



**Ed Crockett**

128 Bramblewood Drive

Portland, ME 04103

Residence: (207) 797-8371

[Ed.Crockett@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Ed.Crockett@legislature.maine.gov)

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

2 STATE HOUSE STATION

AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

*Testimony of Representative Ed Crockett Introducing*

**LD 974, "An Act to Establish the Minimum Hourly Wage for Educational Technicians and Other School Support Staff."**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs*

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed colleagues on the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee: I'm Ed Crockett and I represent House District 112, which includes part of Portland and part of Falmouth. As many of you know I had the honor and privilege of serving on this committee in the 130<sup>th</sup> legislature. Tradition says former committee members must come bearing gifts when presenting to a former committee. So even though I never got to sit in this room as a committee member, I will fulfill my commitment and treat you all to some delicious Capt'n Eli's Root Beer. More importantly, I am here today to introduce LD 974, An Act to Establish the Minimum Hourly Wage for Educational Technicians and Other School Support Staff.

You may be asking yourself why I'm (Representative Crockett) proposing two wage scales for school support staff. My answer to that is straightforward; although all support staff deserve more pay, all jobs **are not** equal.

My original thought for this bill was to focus exclusively on Ed techs. You see, I have been hearing about the inequity of pay for Ed techs for a long time now. Long before I was elected to serve in the legislature. My wife has been a Special Ed-Ed tech at Lyseth Elementary School in Portland for 22 years. We have been blessed. We've had a steady two-person income during that time; however, most of her peers haven't been as fortunate.

In 2023 Ed techs have a tough time making ends meet or cannot unless they get another part time job. That is what my son, an Ed tech in Cumberland and living in Portland, has had to do to cover the basic expenses. He moved to a new district this year for \$2 more an hour. In his former district, which happens to be the wealthiest town in Maine, he was making \$14 an hour. The cost of everything has gone up, but not their compensation. For a little more perspective, it was twenty years before my wife made \$30,000/year in this role. She went eight years without even getting a raise. This for a support staff person, who if you ask her principal(s) and teacher partners, is indispensable. I believe there are Ed techs in every school in this state, like my wife, who are going above and beyond without sufficient compensation. They do it for as long as they can because they are passionate about this work, and they love our kids. Unfortunately, we are losing far too many to better paying jobs outside the public school system. They don't want to leave, but the math simply doesn't add up.

Sadly, while preparing for this legislation over the summer, I learned it wasn't only Ed techs who were underpaid. In speaking with the folks that represent these critical workers I quickly realized this problem is across the board for all support staff. So, I drafted this bill to include all support staff but with a little more for Ed techs.

A fair question is why differentiate among staff members? I believe it is the right thing to do, and as I said at the top, not all jobs are created equal. No disrespect to bus drivers, custodians, or other support staff **because they need and deserve a lift**, but Ed techs, especially those in Special Education, are on the front lines and wearing multiple hats.

Ed techs never get a break, especially Special Ed-Ed techs. They are on every second of every day with their kids because they must be. Special needs and behavioral youth must be monitored every second. Most Ed techs even cover recess and lunch plus arrivals and dismissals. Sometimes they are asked to cover the whole classroom if a teacher is out, as my wife has for the last two months. To add insult to injury, school systems gave personnel last Friday off, unheard of before a vacation week. Teachers got paid; Ed techs did not. Their role is exhausting, and the least respected profession in the system. Yes, it is a profession for many. Grace Leavitt, in a beautiful editorial to the Portland Press Herald on Monday noted that over a third of Ed techs have been at it for over 20 years. I would call that a career. And we should be encouraging this, after all, it's our future that they're mentoring.

Again, at the recent MEA forum we heard from 2 Ed techs (Kim Hubbard + Jessica Stubbs) with over 20 years of experience and learned that this is common. They shared that the Ed techs are on the front lines, and it is not always easy. They are being spit on, scratched and hit by our young people. Think about this for a moment. Most Ed techs are women and are often smaller than those coming at them. Only half kidding, I would have no problem suggesting that the extra pay for Ed techs be considered hazard pay; it certainly would be justified.

If we want to keep experienced people like Kim, Jessica, and my wife, we will have to step it up and treat them fairly, and by that, I mean monetarily.

We must respect and treat these folks better. I'm only asking you for a reasonable and respectable wage. The current below livable wage has created a revolving door in an area of critical need for our most needy student population. It's a recipe for disaster. Now is the time to do the right thing. My recommendation to move all Ed techs to 133% of minimum wage and all other support staff to 125% of minimum wage is a modest ask.

LD 974 will raise the minimum wage for all hourly educational technician employees to 133% of the state minimum wage and raise the minimum wage for all other hourly employees to 125% of the state minimum wage. The minimum wage is based on a 52-week calendar year. The current minimum wage in Maine is \$13.80/hr. The state's minimum wage is scheduled to increase each January based on CPI.

So, for Ed techs @ 133% of Minimum Wage = \$18.35/hr and \$33,397 annually

For other personnel @ 125% of Minimum Wage = \$17.25/hr and \$31,395 annually

The good news here is that many school districts are already above these thresholds. I went to these levels intentionally to keep the fiscal impact down and give this legislation its best chance to pass. This move will help to address the major recruitment and retention issues our schools are facing today. It's a start, but hopefully we can react quickly. With that in mind I propose that the increase in the minimum

wage for all school support staff take effect July 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, adjusting for the 2023-2024 school year on October 1, rather than January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

Finally, this is the group that needs our attention this session. I want to state publicly that I totally support Sen. Pierce's bill to raise teacher salaries to \$50k. In fact, I co-sponsored Rep. Collins bill for the same amount last session. My concern is will there be enough \$\$ available to support all these initiatives? Hopefully, we can, but if not, I think we should be prioritizing our support staff first and foremost.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.