

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Rick Beaulé. I am in my 20th year of teaching and my second year as a Music Teacher and Band and Choir Director in the Lisbon School Department. I am here today to testify in support of LD's 955, 974, 1237 and 1314.

As valuable as we are, we teachers are not the people who are the first and last school employees the kids see each day. We are not the ones who allow them to focus on their studies by not having to focus on an empty belly. Teachers do not maintain school grounds and classrooms or fix things when they break or wear out.

Our Education Support Professionals do all those things. If they don't, my job as a teacher becomes much, much harder. My ceiling for student achievement and success becomes that much lower, my students' potential stunted by barriers they have no control over. They are vital and key components of the success of public schools and public education.

In my two decades of experience as an educator, I see our Education Support Professionals, those ed-techs, aides, and more, filling roles teachers fill when a teacher is out and no subs are to be found. I see them providing vital tutoring assistance in the classroom. I also see them working second and even third jobs to make ends meet. I see them selling items at craft fairs, working second jobs in other districts, at ski slopes, or other seasonal work; anything they can do to meet their basic needs.

Our administrators are having to navigate growing levels of vacancies in our support staff ranks as more employees leave, with those still there increasingly overworked.

We speak often of the importance of our Education Support Professionals. Yet if you apply Dr. King's truism that a budget is a moral document, it reveals a troubling aspect of how we treat this crucial part of our public education system.

At some point, we as a society have allowed ourselves to decide their important work is somehow less worthy of compensation. We haven't valued their contributions to our educational system highly enough to even give them the means to subsist.

We need to change that.

Author Christopher Hopper wrote that, "Laws don't change unless people change first. And that, I'm afraid, is the far more laborious task. Ink embeds parchment, but belief constrains the soul."

Laws, like budgets, also show moral priorities. While none of the four bills your committee is considering completely solve a problem years in the making, they are a step in the right direction. With the force of law, they will begin to change the mistaken belief that the work of our Education Support Professionals is worth anything less than our full-throated support. I wholeheartedly ask you to pass whichever bill or combination of bills will maximize the improvement of the lives of these professionals, recognizing the dignity of their work while removing their worry of supporting themselves and their families.

Thank you for your time today.