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Senator, District 22

THE MAINE SENATE
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Augusta, Maine 04333

**Testimony of Senator James D. Libby
Sponsor of L.D. 1314, "An Act to Establish a Minimum Salary for Educational Specialists,
Educational Technicians, and School Teaching Professionals"**

Public Hearing, Thursday, April 20, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Jim Libby, and I am a State Senator representing Senate District # 22, comprised of the towns of Naples, Sebago, Baldwin, and Standish in Cumberland County; Hiram and Porter in Oxford County; and, Limington, Limerick, Cornish, Parsonsfield, Newfield, Acton, and Shapleigh, in the County of York.

It is my honor to bring to your attention the contents of L.D. 1314, "An Act to Establish a Minimum Salary for Educational Specialists, Educational Technicians, and School Teaching Professionals."

This bill establishes, starting with the school years after June 30, 2024, a minimum hourly wage for educational specialists, educational technicians and other school teaching professionals equal to 200% of the state minimum hourly wage.

This bill also requires the Commissioner of Education, based on a list provided annually by each school administrative unit, to allocate funds provided by the Legislature to each school administrative unit necessary to fund the incremental salary increases. So, beginning in fiscal year 2024-25, the commissioner shall increase the state share of the total allocation to a qualifying school administrative unit by an amount necessary to achieve the minimum salary for educational specialists, educational technicians and school teaching professionals.

It is my familiarity with Educational Technicians and the jobs that they do that has led me to feel strongly about this issue. Years ago, I began to notice the importance of the amount of time and instruction carried out by "Ed Tech's" in classrooms around the state. I find it ironic that in most cases, these professionals are providing direct instruction to students in classes. In cases that I am familiar with, classes that are under the direction of a fully credentialed, master's degree-holding teachers of excellence are also being taught by Ed Techs! I doubt that I need to tell this Committee the difference in overall pay. Yet these professionals are teaching language, syllables, writing, mathematics, you name it.

If you run a quick calculation, you may be surprised at how low the level of pay will still be if this bill is adopted. These professionals, while admittedly at a different level of qualification and pay than other teaching colleagues, are nevertheless providing critical direct instruction to children. Their roles are indispensable, yet currently, school districts around the state are taking advantage of the mismatch

between what these professionals are doing and the pay for the service.

I have spoken to school district budget professionals about this issue, and while they have been in competition for Ed Techs in recent budget cycles has been stronger, and the pay has risen, pay for these professionals remains well below the value they provided to the district. These school district budget professionals, superintendents, school board members, teachers, and other staff have asked me in near unanimity to offer this bill. Although there are many other school professionals who offer direct services to our children, the type of instruction that these teaching professionals provide rises to the level in which they deserve a baseline minimum wage, as they work next to classroom teachers who already do. In fact, this Committee has in recent years passed a minimum wage bill for teachers. While I may not agree with some minimum wage efforts, particularly those governing the private sector, it is certainly a proper role of this state to set and enforce payment minimums to jobs funded by the public sector.

There are some technical aspects of this bill that will require amendment. I will be working on drafting technical amendments between now and the date of the work session for this bill.

I appreciate the time you have granted me today, and will remain to respond to questions.