



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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April 25, 2023

Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher, cosponsor, supporting
LD 1155, An Act to Address Legislative Salaries
Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover and esteemed members of the State and Local Government Committee, I am Laurie Osher and I represent District 25, the majority of Orono. Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for **LD 1155, An Act to Address Legislative Salaries**. I had submitted a similar proposal before cloture, and I was glad to combine my efforts with those of Sen. Woodsome and my fellow cosponsors in support of LD 1155.

As legislators, we all know that we do not serve for the compensation we receive. Being here and representing our communities is an incredible honor. Few things in life are as meaningful as the opportunity to be the voice of our constituents, and I am humbled by the trust my neighbors have in me. I believe all of you feel the same way.

My experience, however, has been that members of the public are often unaware of just how much of a sacrifice it can be financially. Serving in the Legislature is, for much of the year, a full-time job or even more, but members of the 131st Legislature are projected to be paid, on average, less than \$14,000 per year.

This combination of extremely low pay and enormous time commitment prevents qualified Mainers from serving and leads many of those of us who do to struggle. It creates a structural barrier to legislative service for young people, people of color, and low-income and working class Mainers. Because of this, the Legislature does not accurately reflect the Mainers who elect us. There are vital perspectives that are underrepresented or even missing from the conversation because too many Mainers cannot afford to serve.

That is why LD 1155 is so important, not just to us as individuals but to the institution and to the state we serve. Our government works best when everyone has a seat at the table. But right now, that just is not the case.

Even for those of us who are able to serve, many of us are constantly choosing between our legislative work and paying our bills. Some of us have had to miss votes because we cannot afford to miss work. Virtually all of us with jobs outside the Legislature have had to choose between our commitments here and our work at home.

I feel fortunate that I can devote the time to be here in Augusta for a good part of the year. When I began my first term, the 130th Legislature, I was a small business owner. The time demands of the Legislature were such that there was not enough time available to run my small business too. I referred potential clients to others who did have time to assist them, and my income dwindled. I'm grateful that I was able to find employment with Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC) during the second year of the session, but my situation- my combination of experience and skills fitting EMDC's needs is unique. I can certainly understand why so many of our talented, dedicated colleagues are unable to seek reelection. The cost of serving is simply too high for so many of us and our families.

This is not about any of us as individual legislators. It is about making sure this institution fully reflects and serves all our constituents.

Mainers are no strangers to hard work and long hours. They also support fair wages for that work. Mainers believe in good governance and a strong democracy. I feel confident our constituents will understand that these are the same values that LD 1155 represents, especially when they see us come together in a bipartisan way to support this measure. In addition to our bipartisan slate of bill sponsors, several dozen legislators of all political affiliations have expressed their support for this proposal.

I urge you to join me in supporting LD 1155. Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me.



MAINE LEGISLATURE
STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

April 2023

Senator Tim Nangle
Representative Holly Stover
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Sen. Nangle, Rep. Stover and members of the State and Local Government Committee:

We, the undersigned members of the 131st Legislature, write to express our strong support of **LD 1155, An Act to Address Legislative Salaries**. We do not serve for the compensation, but we strongly believe that the low pay lawmakers receive is a barrier that prevents our legislative body from serving our state as well as it should.

As you know well, for much of the year, serving in the Legislature is a full-time job – if not more. However, members of the 131st Legislature are projected to be paid, on average, less than \$14,000 per year. The combination of the extremely low pay and enormous time commitment prevents qualified Mainers from serving and leads many of those of us who do to struggle.

Low pay creates a structural barrier to legislative service for young people, people of color, and low-income and working class Mainers. Because of this, the Legislature does not accurately reflect the Mainers who elect us. There are vital perspectives that are underrepresented or even missing from the conversation because too many Mainers cannot afford to serve.

Even for those of us who are able to serve, many of us are constantly faced with choices between our legislative work and paying our bills. Some of us have had to miss votes because we cannot afford to miss work. Many of us have had to choose between our commitments as legislators and our “day jobs,” with one or both suffering as a result.

In recent years, we have seen an increasing number of our talented, dedicated colleagues choose not to run for reelection because the cost to them and to their families is simply too high. This has been a loss for our institution and for the state we serve.

For these reasons, we have come together to support a bipartisan solution. LD 1155 would raise legislative salaries to a total of \$45,000 over the two-year term. While this measure will not eliminate the challenges we face, it is a bipartisan compromise that takes us in the right direction.

All of us – Republicans, Democrats and Independents – recognize that the status quo is not sustainable and does not serve the people of Maine. In order for our citizen’s Legislature to best serve our fellow Mainers, our work needs to pay a fair, living wage.

Please join us in supporting **LD 1155**. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,