

Testimony of Alec Maybarduk
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989

In Support of LD 1854, An Act to Complete and Implement the Comprehensive Review of the Classification and Compensation System for Executive Branch Employees, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine

Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government,
Friday, May 12, 2023, Cross Office Building Room 214 and Electronically

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, I'm Alec Maybarduk, Executive Director of the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. The Maine Service Employees Association represents over 13,000 workers, including workers in the Executive Branch of Maine State Government. We respectfully urge you to support LD 1854, An Act to Complete and Implement the Comprehensive Review of the Classification and Compensation System for Executive Branch Employees, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine.

I want you to know it meant a great deal to our members to see the broad bipartisan support for this legislation in the list of sponsors. I know for many of the committee members the stories you are hearing today from State workers don't come as a surprise. For years members of our union have been talking with you, your fellow members of the 131st Legislature, and all the Maine Legislatures that preceded about the urgent need to fix the State of Maine's broken compensation and classification system. The State Employee Pay Gap was documented by a state study back in 2009 and in another state study conducted in 2020. As you are hearing in the testimony state workers are giving today, kicking this can down the road is no longer an option; we implore you to pass, fund and enact LD 1854.

The state workers who are testifying are speaking up not just out of concern for their own financial security but also about their ability to deliver quality services for all Maine people. We recently asked our members to tell us how the pay gap affects them, their families and the services they provide. In his testimony, MSEA-SEIU President Dean Staffieri shared many responses highlighting state workers' financial concerns and their inability to make ends meet. Many also went into great detail about the harm the pay gap is causing to the State's ability to recruit and retain workers. Many spoke of the urgency to act now, as those who thus far remain with the state are experiencing increased workloads, which causes more workers to leave, creating a vicious cycle of understaffing, high turnover. Because of this, the longer we wait, the harder it is to fix. They're asking for your help, not just for themselves or their families, but so they can do their jobs in service to the people of our great State. I'd like to share with you some of those stories (my written testimony includes 26) highlighting the pay gap's impact on recruitment and retention in their worksites:

"I work at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center and we currently have a vacancy (rate) in the nursing department (of) 18%, or about 1-in-5 nursing staff. This doesn't include the number of per diem and agency nurses (aka travel nurses) that the hospital utilizes. This has two major effects on the nursing department – a combination of increased work per nursing staff and decreased availability of nursing staff to the patients in the hospital. This is realized by increasing voluntary and involuntary overtime for staff. It also reduces the number of patients that the hospital can safely admit and treat. Our patients come from emergency departments, private hospitals, jails, and residential treatment facilities, meaning

those environments cannot transfer patients requiring more intense care. There are less staff to monitor the patients for aggression or violence, nursing-to-patient ratios are kept at minimal levels, and the existing staff are more at risk of stress and burnout. Staff from other departments are pulled on to the floor and are less able to complete their work assignments or less able to provide therapeutic, recreational, and diversional activities to patients. Overall, it keeps the hospital constrained to only provide 'adequate' services to a reduced number of patients instead of 'excellent' service to more patients and creates more backlogs, waitlists, and languishing throughout the system at large."

--A worker at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center

"It's actually embarrassing when people see what I do every day but then hear what the pay grade is for this position. I am embarrassed for staying so long but state service is important to me. You know who should be embarrassed and ashamed? Every single person who determines what state employees make as well as the current administration who has refused to meet with our union to bring Maine state employees in line with the same positions in other states who make way more money than we make. Could you imagine the quality workers we could employ if the state paid livable wages? Instead, we have a huge turnover rate and have to constantly train new people just for them to leave when they get a better paying job in a month. Taken from salary.com: The average Accounting Associate salary in the United States is \$47,571 as of March 28, 2023, but the salary range typically falls between \$42,930 and \$53,092. I made less than \$38,000 last year. That's almost \$10,000 than the average Accounting Associate per year. That is degrading, exploitive, disgusting and unacceptable."

--A worker for Maine DHHS

"At the very least, wages need to increase with the cost of living annually, not even addressing how underpaid State employees are – this is a bare minimum. Employees will be forced to leave if something isn't done soon because it's just not feasible to exist on State wages. Please consider paying livable wages."

--A worker for Maine DAFS

"The pay gap not only hurts our welfare, but also makes it very difficult for our hospital (Riverview Psychiatric Center) to keep our staff positions filled. This also creates an increase in the likelihood of an injury occurring to our staff when we are short-staffed – even worse when someone fails to report to his shift on the patient unit(s). Our hospital has had problems keeping minimum staffing levels of Hospital Custodial Workers, Mental Health Workers, cooks, and Nurses, in particular, and those are just the positions that I am aware of. DHHS is aware of our struggles to keep this hospital staffed. We do not even have enough staff to allow all our hospital beds to be filled (and this is a State budgetary/funding issue as well). This is just another argument to close the pay gap, if not exceed it in our case."

--A worker for Riverview Psychiatric Center

"I spent five years not able to make it to scheduled appointments because of this job's demands, not able to afford my medical bills. Because I have spent so many years just scraping by, I am now almost 30 with almost no savings. Again, I have been careful. But, I do not have a spouse, I do not have inheritance. But, I shouldn't have to. Because I have dedicated work and expertise to show for it, and wish to be paid accordingly. I understand that the humans behind the work are always the least important part of the budget, but despite loving the work I do, I am also here to earn a living. I would like to stay, but I won't be able to make it work much longer."

--A worker for Maine DHHS

"We've had a revolving door in several offices because new hires are being offered significantly more money in the private sector, so they don't stay. One Paralegal in our Augusta Advocate Office is going to a private law firm because they offered her almost \$20k more per year than we pay our paralegals. She leaves next week (4/17-21/2023)."

-- A worker for the Maine Workers' Compensation Board

"As a supervisor, we are struggling to onboard quality candidates. The qualifications required for these positions do not realistically correlate with the pay range that is offered. We offered a Staff Accountant position to someone with 15+ years' experience in advanced accounting. They had glowing professional references, a wonderful (well documented) work ethic, a positive attitude and strong leadership skills. They would truly be an asset to our team and the State. However, they currently make \$7.06 more an hour in the private sector than they would here at Step 1. Our team did its best to advocate for this prospective candidate, requesting a higher pay step hoping to close the deficit by \$2-\$3 dollars (which in retrospect would have put them higher than myself as their potential supervisor). HR approved a rate of pay that is \$5.27 less than they currently make. \$1.87 more than the minimum pay rate offered, and \$.97 less than myself. Unfortunately, they will not be accepting the position and rightfully so. Not only does this pay gap fuel resentment and frustration for current state employees, it deters possible (valuable) employees from applying. Just on our team, we are severely understaffed which makes it hard to properly train, which leads to falling behind. It's a vicious cycle. I can only assume all departments are caught in the same under current."

-- A worker for the General Government Service Center within Maine DAFS

"It just doesn't impact me but the whole camp. We lose good employees because they can go elsewhere and make more money. If the gap was closer, maybe they wouldn't leave so early. There is gonna be a time when it's too late. I'm sure the State doesn't want to see what can happen so they better act now before it's too late. Not only you will retain the workers you have; you might be able to hire more."

-- A worker for Maine DOT

"The biggest current way that it (the state employee pay gap) affects me is how it affects my work life now. We are having a very hard time hiring several positions that we have vacant. Some we have been trying to hire for almost a year. We spend many, many hours in the hiring process, only to have the candidates that we offer the jobs to decline because we can't get the pay to a reasonable level. In addition, we continue to lose staff, and one of the reasons that they give is the pay scale. Another reason is that more work falls on current staff when people leave, causing more stress to the people who remain. We do important public health and regulatory work that must be done. I am afraid that at some point our program, as well as other state programs, will not have enough staff to do the necessary work."

--A worker for Maine DHHS

"The pay gap has negatively impacted the Engineering workforce in the State. In particular, our Engineering Group in Tech Services, Dept of Environmental Protection have over the past year had 2 employees leave to the private sector as a result of increased pay and benefits. We have tried to hire replacement Engineers with no luck to date. We have broadened the search for qualified individuals beyond the confines of Maine without success. We have downgraded one of the positions hoping we could attract recent graduates (knowing that we may just be a training ground until they decide to move on for greener, better paying pastures). This has not been successful to date, either, and any time we have been able to interview potential candidates, we have found they plan to accept a job in the private sector or a larger municipal entity (like a Greater Portland, or PWD) over the State due to the better pay

and benefits. Our staff is becoming increasingly over-worked and stressed as a result. (This will eventually lead to a further decline in mental welfare..... which I worry about as a Supervisor)."

--A worker for Maine DEP

"Quite simply, I could not afford to work in this position if I wasn't married with another person's income to help support our expenses. Cost of living – rent, food, transportation, etc. – is SO much higher than what our paychecks cover. I'm seeing this also as we try over and over again to fill open positions. Usually our top 1-2 candidates turn us down because they cannot 'take a pay cut' to accept the position. I've had candidates even go so far as to say the level of compensation is offensive for the work we do.

The pay gap is hurting our ability to hire and retain quality employees. I enjoy the work that I do and luckily having my husband's income to supplement what we bring in each month allows me to continue the work. But that shouldn't be a requirement to be a state employee."

--A worker for the Maine Department of Labor

"The pay at DOT is so low that the gas sign next to the camp is paying only 13 cents less even with the 2 dollar stipend. I have had a CDL class A for 15 years. The contractor about a mile away is paying almost \$4 per hour more."

--A worker for Maine DOT

"The idea of leaving the State of Maine causes me great anxiety but as I approach retirement in less than 10 years I simply can't afford to live on my state salary anymore."

--A worker for Maine DEP

"I have been with the state for almost 20 years – over 20 with total time of temp work. My pay capped out years ago. I do not want to be a supervisor or manager. I actually like what I do. I get longevity and the little 2 – 3 % increases, and they don't do anything to help with the inflation of the world today. I live paycheck to barely paycheck. It's sad to think I could go get more money flipping burgers now than working for the State. I had to be fingerprinted and background-checked to do certain parts of my job. I have access to certain things no one else in my unit has. I'm the only person in the state that does my job, and I am thinking of leaving. No one will stay because the pay is so bad. We have a revolving door of help, because they promote out ASAP for more money. We are stressed because we have to pick up the slack from fewer staff. If I could figure out how to freeze my retirement I would go back to the (private) sector and earn more, and have less stress. The state used to be the place to work, now we are the place no one wants to work."

-- A worker for the Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles

"We used to have 200 applicants when we had an open position. Just this week (4/13/2023) we held interviews for an OAll position, we had 3 people who interviewed. No one wants to come work for the state anymore because they know they can make more working ANYWHERE else, including McDonalds or other fast food restaurants. We are losing employees to the private sector because of the same reason. We cannot compete with what the private sector is willing and able to pay new employees and to retain their employees. We have employees within our division that can never afford to retire if they stay here."

--A worker for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

"Our department has several positions open and cannot fill them due to the issue that the starting pay is so low. I have personally recommended multiple people for the vacant positions and they decline the position because of the pay. Add on top of that having to wait literally MONTHS for our step raises

because leadership cannot be bothered to do our reviews on time, we get jacked in taxes once it finally comes through. I was looking at a property to purchase and have reminded my supervisors multiple times about my review. I have student loan debt and this pay raise would tip the scale in my favor for a property loan. My raise was due in February, it's now mid-April and the property I wanted has been sold."

--A worker for the Office of Behavioral Health within Maine DHHS

"When I came to the State of Maine I was offered roughly 60% of my pay as it was in the private sector and that pay had to be specially approved by the Commissioner of Finance. The fact the salary had to be specifically approved tells me that most folks would start at a salary level even lower than what I received. This gap in pay has made it necessary for me to work additional jobs. I officiate high school sports of all kinds and although I enjoy the work, I have to do this in order to help bridge this pay differential. If I wasn't officiating, I would need to take on a part-time weekend/evenings job to help with living expenses. I spend very little time at home with my family as a result of this need. Regarding the Division of Audit within DHHS, we have had no less than 4 open positions in my department since I started there in 2021 and have over 10 positions, we could fill across the entire Division. This lack of staff has increased my required output with no requisite increase in pay nor are we allowed to work overtime. We continue to lose staff to retirement or promotion out of the Division. There is increased stress due to the staffing shortage. How do we attract quality talent when we offer sub-par compensation?"

--A worker for the Division of Audit within Maine DHHS

"This pay gap thing has created a lot of stress in my home life as well as my work life. With what the State starts out for pay for so many of the departments within the state makes no sense. First, we can't find and hire qualified help with a starting pay lower than say at a McDonald's. And promoting in a department is just as bad. How can, for instance say we have 2 Executive Housekeepers for a department because there's never been an upgrade and one makes less than the Building Custodians and the Housekeeper II they supervise, and both having the same job responsibilities? It all just seems so unfair and frustrating to say the least. Especially after investing so much of your life in a department and finding out financially it would take the rest of your life to even get to a point where you could retire with even just 3 of your highest years being your lowest compared to any other job not in the state government."

--A worker for the Bureau of General Services within Maine DAFS

"Our agency, DDS, has lost over 30 employees in the last few years. We are having major difficulty performing our job functions due to the staff turnover and the inexperience of the new people we hire, who unfortunately are leaving before being fully trained. We have only 8 adjudicators (these people do the vast majority of the work here) here with more than 3 years' experience doing the work of assessing Social Security disability claims. This job takes at least 2-4 years to learn. Personally I have 6 children and with the increased cost of living money is very tight, and I often go without my medications to save money."

--A worker for Disability Determination Services within Maine DHHS

"My office has had a lot of movement due to staff needing a higher pay grade. Even though these staff may stay in state employment, they leave our bureau. Training new people takes an awful lot of time, just to have them turn around and leave, so we train someone else. Higher pay or more steps would help retention and speed up processing of the tax credit that so many businesses are waiting for."

--A worker for the Bureau of Employment Services within the Maine Department of Labor

“The pay gap between jobs at DHHS and the closest equivalent jobs in the private sector (the insurance industry) is significant. Not only does the pay gap have a direct monetary impact on DHHS employees and their families, but there is a more long-term, corrosive impact on our workforce caused by poor retention. Employees are hired at DHHS, gain valuable skills, and promptly move to the private sector in order to be fairly paid for those skills.”

--A worker for Maine DHHS

“In the EUT (Education in Unorganized Territory), we are not competitive with other schools in the pay and benefits of hourly employees, many of which are classified as seasonal part-time. They lose benefits during the summer months and do not have the option to receive their pay pro-rated for year-round pay. This makes it very difficult to recruit and retain these employees. Bus drivers are held at the minimum wage level for multiple pay steps (and steps are not earned on a yearly-basis, as they are often seasonal and part-time). Staff who are not working during the summer are not able to apply to work for things like summer school as they are laid off during this time and the weeks are one week per month (to maintain skills). Pay for these summer services is not even close to that offered by other school districts in our area. Hourly pay for a teacher or aide is low, and does not reflect the time and travel of summer work (as other districts often inflate this to reflect this to at least double the hourly rate).

--A worker for a State-run school in Maine's Unorganized Territories

“The pay gap affects life in several ways, from living paycheck to paycheck and not being able to keep up with the rising costs of power, groceries, gas etc... The cost of living keeps increasing yet our pay does not meet the demand. Within the Department of Transportation, all who are employed get no relief. The amount of hours operating to maintain the roads in the winter is insane due to lack of employees. The numbers represent themselves as to how short-staffed we are. I hear all the time about how we hire people, train them and once they have gotten their class B or class A they move on, as they can make more money elsewhere. That is a lot of time and money invested to lose employees as often as we do. In today's world and with the younger generation, it is not all about the benefits; it is about the pay.

They can go make more money elsewhere and not have to work in the conditions or the hours necessary within the Department of Transportation. We all see it and hear it every day. Why not close the gap and keep the employees we have from leaving and interest new employees?”

--A worker for Maine DOT

“I think the pay gap has caused a lot of turnover in my department – some people leave after a few years for higher pay in the private sector. Starting out in my position, there were a lot of things to figure out and pick up where they were left off. Yes our work is always changing and evolving, but I think the higher turnover also causes confusion and can lower quality of work put out by the State. There is only so much we can do to pick up the slack when there are gaps in knowledge, and I've also personally experienced an overwhelming workload helping cover a position during the hiring process. It makes me ponder if I need to leave a job I love to do, with people I enjoy working with. Has had significant impacts on my mental health and sense of ability to do my job, helping people in the State of Maine.”

--A worker for Maine DEP

“I am currently employed as an occupational therapist, with almost 15 years' experience. Prior to working for the State of Maine, I had over 8 years of experience working for both for- and non-profit organizations as a director of rehabilitation services. I hired, managed and supervised occupational, speech and physical therapists during that time. In comparison, the State of Maine hires and pays therapists at a significantly lower rate than any other company I have worked for – example: a seasoned

OT like myself would be hired at about \$8-9 more than what I am currently paid with the State. The benefits are slightly better adding several more holidays; however, the comparison in overall PTO benefits, and more recently, insurance premiums are becoming more competitive. The rate of pay as an experienced OT is more comparable to a fresh, out of school new grad OT when employed with the State of Maine versus other competitive companies. This makes it extremely difficult to hire good, reliable therapists when there are more opportunities to make a reasonable wage elsewhere, especially given the current tuition rates of graduate school. I have been hired for the State for just under a year, and in that time we have lost 2 other OT's due to competitive wages elsewhere. Examples like this should be reflective in how we address issues with our pay gap."

-- A worker for the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services within Maine DHHS

"Below: (10K gap min.) see my pay vs other pay comparison for relative positions big gap – no additional steps or higher positions in my field to make it up.

My MaineDOT Pay

HOURLY RATE: \$33.75 Annual 70,200.00 TITLE: TRANS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Similar recently advertised Positions...

Boston Planning & Development Agency

TITLE: Senior Landscape Architect

\$117,897.00 To 135,582.00 Annually

Work Environment:

Normal office environment, occasional site visits.

Landscape Architect/Project Manager

WE ARE VHB! We're an inspired and innovative team of engineers, scientists, planners, and designers who partner with clients in the transportation, real estate, institutional, and energy industries, as well as federal, state, and local governments.

Salary Range: \$86,000-\$102,000

-- A worker for MaineDOT

Fortunately, there is a solution to the State Employee Pay Gap and the resulting recruitment and retention problem throughout Maine State Government. Please support, fund and pass LD 1854. The future of quality services depends on it. Thank you and I would be glad to answer any questions.