

February 8th, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Maine Legislature's Committee on State and Local Government,

I'm Brian Markey. I work for MaineDOT currently as an Assistant Technician and prior to that as a Transportation Worker III. I live in Kenduskeag. I'm writing on my own time in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine.

I've been with MaineDOT for eight years. I work seven days a week in order to pay my mortgage, health insurance, childcare and just day-to-day bills – heats, lights and stuff. I have a second job to make ends meet. I'd like to share with you my wages at each job and the work I do for each employer. At my second job, Bangor Aviation Food Service, the parent company that operates the restaurants at BIA, pays me \$30 an hour to service vending machines at the airport. But in my main job, with MaineDOT, I earn \$22.76 an hour operating a \$1.2 million testing vehicle for the department – and yes that hourly rate reflects in the recent 6% pay raise that Executive Branch workers received.

You need to know that the pay at MaineDOT is not enough to even really survive on. I just barely pay the bills. And it's not just the low pay that's a problem. It's also the huge workloads caused by understaffing. There are so many vacant positions we're all stretched way too thin. In my former job as a transportation worker, I once plowed continuously for 42-and-a-half hours straight, during the bomb cyclone of February 2017. You see double-vision, triple-vision, when you get that tired. This is all dangerous and hard work. It requires our full attention to keep everyone safe, not just the workers but the general public as well. In fact, MaineDOT is so short-staffed of plow drivers right now that they have asked me to plow this winter due to staffing shortages. It's not part of my job, but I've recently plowed for 25 hours in conjunction with my regular job.

Throughout Maine DOT, and the rest of state government, there's a big problem with recruiting and retaining qualified workers. It's been going on for decades. Some of you may recall that back in January of 2009, the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services contracted with Crescendo Consulting for a labor market survey. That survey found that even back in 2009, MaineDOT highway crews were paid 21.6 percent less than their private sector counterparts.

Whenever a MaineDOT camp is short Transportation Workers, it means everyone else has to work twice as hard. This leaves all of us vulnerable to health and safety problems. You can get rushed and that can lead to problems real fast.

In recent years, there has been some progress in dealing with the recruitment and retention problem at MaineDOT. A Recruitment and Retention Committee over the years took action to make things better in some job classifications. But there's much more work to be done and many more DOT classifications to address. We all know a Department-wide, State-wide solution is needed.

The State must start paying all of us fairly for the hard work we do. Management needs to stop lowballing the pay of state workers and start paying us fairly. You have the latest facts: As of 2020, State of Maine workers were being paid on average 15 percent less than what our

counterparts make throughout New England, and that's even after accounting for regional differences. It's all spelled out in the 2020 State of Maine Market Study Report. And it's even worse for some positions. Maintenance mechanics who work for the State of Maine are unperpaid by 31 percent, according to the report.. It should come as no surprise, then, that because MaineDOT competes with municipalities and the private sector for workers, the pattern of MaineDOT training drivers who then leave state service for better pay in the private sectors and municipalities is continuing.

The State Employee Pay Gap has worsened since that 2020 report came out. State wages haven't kept up with the rising cost of living, so my coworkers and I have been falling further and further behind. That's why I'm asking you to support LD 2121 to provide the funding necessary for the Executive Branch of Maine State Government to both complete and implement the State compensation and classification systems and close the state employee pay gap.

Funding and enacting LD 2121 is necessary to ensure the quality MaineDOT services folks count on, as well as the quality services Maine people count on from all other departments of Maine State Government. Please support LD 2121. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brian Markey
Kenduskeag, Maine