

Senator Timothy Nangle
Representative Holly Stover
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
February 8, 2024

Dear Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State & Local Government Committee,

As organizations dedicated to the protection of Maine's natural environment and human health, we ask you to support LD 2121, *An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions*, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine.

This bill would help close the state employee pay gap by funding a new compensation and classification system for State of Maine Executive Branch workers. As you know, studies in 2009 and 2020 found that state workers were underpaid by 15% in comparison to their public and private sector counterparts in Maine and New England.

Our organizations have seen again and again the consequence of this pay gap, which has left nearly 2,100 positions vacant across the state. Challenges in recruitment and retention undermine the state's ability to carry out critical functions serving both residents and visitors. Some examples:

- At a time when the climate crisis demands action, the Maine Forest Service struggled for nearly 18 months to fill the critical position of Climate & Forest Carbon Specialist.
- Likewise, the Maine Forest Service continuously struggles to recruit and retain qualified foresters. A healthy forest is one of our strongest means of absorbing carbon pollution.
- The Board of Pesticide Control, under the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, lost their only toxicologist to Vermont, reportedly due to a higher salary.
- As Maine faces the consequences of widespread PFAS contamination, the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) ability to track affected locations has been impacted by lack of staff, at times reduced to one person.
- The DEP recently lost an experienced hydropower licensing specialist to the federal government.
- As stormwater pollution continues to escalate, DEP needs more staffing to review land use permits and modernize its coastal land use rules and regulations to harmonize development with protection of water quality. Low pay has hampered filling environmental engineer positions at DEP, needed to ensure compliance with water quality protections.
- Short staffing at DEP has made it exceedingly challenging to meet environmental permit review deadlines, at a time when the state is experiencing significant growth and development pressure.
- The position of Director of the Land for Maine's Future program remained open for months while qualified individuals declined to apply or accept the position due to pay concerns.
- State park managers face long hours and short staffing. At least one opted to relocate to another state offering better compensation.

- Last year 24 state park managers signed a letter reading “Without the workforce necessary to see to their upkeep, visitors will soon begin to encounter parks that are dirtier, less safe, and far below the standard that we, the park staff, want to maintain. Without the resources to rectify this, we fear an increase in accidents and injuries and a general lowered public perception of those spaces that have traditionally been clean, well-kept, and responsible for offering a safe and enjoyable recreational experience to the public.”

These are but a few examples representative of the larger challenge. Not only do high vacancies hamper the services the public depends upon, but continuous turnover costs the state money in the form of advertising and training for new employees. Further, increased workload for the remaining employees coupled with low pay erodes morale. That some state employees have reported working a second job or relying on food banks to make ends meet is simply unacceptable.

While we appreciate the strides that Governor Mill’s administration has made in restoring much needed positions and addressing the pay gap, we know that the agencies charged with protecting human and environmental health are underfunded and understaffed.

We ask you to help to address this situation by passing LD 2121.

Thank you,

Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director
Appalachian Mountain Club



John Burrows, Vice President of US Operations
Atlantic Salmon Federation



Sean Mahoney, Vice President and Senior Counsel, Maine
Conservation Law Foundation



Sarah Woodbury, Vice President of Programs and Policy
Defend Our Health



Solutions for a
Toxic-Free Tomorrow

Ivy Frignoca, Casco Baykeeper
Friends of Casco Bay



Friends of Casco Bay
Casco BAYKEEPER

Francesca Gundrum, Policy Advocate
Maine Audubon



Beth Ahearn, Director of Government Affairs
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Olivia Griset, Executive Director
Maine Environmental Education Association



Heather Spalding, Deputy Director and Senior Policy Director
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association



Rebecca Boulos, Executive Director
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