

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs committee. Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, members of the Inland Fisheries & Wildlife Committee. My name is Derik Lee, I am here on my own personal time to share with you why the Legislature ought to defend and grow funds for Maine's Executive Branch workers in LD210.

I've been working for the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Hatchery Division for 11 years. I've been at the Palermo Rearing Station for 2 years. This is a 3-person station. We have seen several resignations over the last few years, and compensation is a big part of that. This is why we have seen a number of fish culture staff leave and why others are currently seeking other opportunities.

As a young angler growing up in Skowhegan, I had zero knowledge about how the Hatchery division works. Most of the public does not. It takes an incredible amount of labor, time, and effort, but our work is not rewarded for all that we do. Not in a way that allows us to comfortably support ourselves.

I have seen a significant decrease in morale over my time in hatcheries. We are not getting paid enough and feel undervalued for the work that we provide. We provide a huge recreational opportunity for the State of Maine. We feel the general public values us. It's always great to see an angler's face when we roll up and start pouring in the fish, but we do not feel that same value when we see our checks.

I know there is a fear, that because of how underpaid we are, that experienced staff are seeking opportunities elsewhere. If we lose personnel due to low wages, that will lead to periods of understaffing and loss of institutional knowledge. Paired with the low wages which hurts our ability to recruit qualified workers, we will be left in a more challenging staffing situation than we are today. This can be reversed.

I do not see this as a temporary situation. This is something that has been going on for some time, and this problem will not resolve itself without significant changes.

The legislature holds the keys to help us close the pay gap. If closed, we could recruit quality employees, and retain knowledgeable staff. This would help morale and continue our ability to provide a high degree of dedication to the job and the fisheries across the State of Maine. We are proud to work here. We have a lot of dedication and pride in the work we do, but we cannot subsist on pride and dedication alone.

Thank you for your time.

Derik Lee  
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