

Testimony regarding LD34

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Esteemed Representatives:

Thank you for providing an opportunity to bear witness. The lack of certified teachers entering the profession in Maine has become a critical issue over the last decade and it has reached a crisis point. When I worked in Portland, three teachers that I knew personally left education within their year of hire. This year, I took a position in a suburban district because housing in Portland was unaffordable. In the suburban elementary schools of my new district, I know of two coworkers retiring and there is an ongoing search for replacements. There is a constant shortage of substitute and support staff as well. When replacements aren't found, schools scramble to make do with using substitute teachers and support staff such as myself. When I ask why my coworkers are leaving, the answer is always a financial one.

The salary a teacher can make upon entering the profession can easily be countered by a better offer from private sector entities. I myself have been offered positions in fields such as social work, health care, marketing, hospitality and even retail management. This bill you are considering would make an entry level teacher's salary competitive with such offers, and is a necessary step in addressing this crisis. It will also allow teachers to afford housing. I currently live in a camper year round to make ends meet on an educator's salary. Changing districts was not an easy decision and I still haven't been replaced. Since I left, my mentor there has also left to work on social services for more money. Many of my new coworkers face similar difficult financial decisions: one is splitting a house with her ex husband because her income isn't enough to apply for a mortgage solo. Other creative living situations such as basement roommates and extended family shack ups are also strategies made in desperation. Second and third "side gigs" are the norm, and rare is the teacher that actually doesn't work during a vacation. I witness burnout on the increase every day due to job vacancies, and this high stress environment makes it even more difficult to retain educators. I hope you will sincerely making this step in the right direction by voting your support for educators. Please vote yes for LD34. Thank you.