

Kendrah Fisher- Dover-Foxcroft

Testimony for LD 34- An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary in Maine

February 26th, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee- My name is Kendrah Fisher and I live in Dover-Foxcroft and work as a 7th grade science teacher at SeDoMoCha Middle School. I am here to testify in support of LD 34, An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary in Maine.

I am currently half way through my second year of teaching, and am very proud to work as a teacher in Maine. When I share with folks that I am a teacher, the type of response that I often receive is along the lines of "Wow that is so great! We really need great teachers in our schools". This response is one that I couldn't agree more with. We do have amazing teachers in our schools, but also thousands of certified teachers who are choosing not to teach because they can not afford to. If people are not able to step up and fill these roles, what does that mean for our students?

I just got married this past September, and am only able to work as a teacher because I am supported by my husband's income. If I were a single person, I would not be able to afford basic costs of living on a teacher's salary. After taking only my net income and subtracting the cost of just necessary expenses, I would be left with an over expenditure of -\$21.19 dollars each month. (See cost breakdown below.)

This is unacceptable. Maine is struggling to recruit and retain quality teachers because they simply can not afford to live here and teach. I have had colleagues share with me that when they began teaching, they relied on food stamps to support their family. Others that I know quit teaching because the cost of childcare exceeded their pay. I should not have to be reliant on my husband to afford living, while working as a professional who holds a Bachelor's Degree, especially when that degree is a requirement to work in my field. Just like so many other hard working Mainers, I put so much extra time, dedication, and effort into my job, but that work is not reflected in my pay.

My colleagues and I serve as positive community role models for so many students. As educators, we all support our students in and out of the classroom because we want our students to grow up and be happy, healthy, productive members of society. We chaperone, coach, fundraise, and organize crucial services like food pantries for our students by volunteering our own time.

We should be able to do all of this while making a livable wage. Maine should be concerned about how we are going to continue to retain current teachers in the profession, and recruit new teachers to do the same in the future, especially when they play such a vital role in shaping the next generation of Mainers. If people can not afford to live and work in Maine, then who will? We need to be proactive, and support raising the minimum teacher salary to 50k to protect Maine's present and future students, teachers, and communities.

Thank you.

Monthly Total Income: \$2,375.54

Expenses

Rent- \$700.00
Heating Oil- \$350.00
Propane- \$30.00
Electric- \$70.00
Internet- \$70.00
Groceries/Toiletries- \$400.00
Cell Phone- \$80.00
Car Loan- \$256.56
Gas- \$120.00
Car Insurance- \$124.88
Rental Insurance- \$7.60
Student Loans- \$187.69

Expenses Total: \$2,396.73

Remaining Funds: -\$21.19

This is my second year advocating for this legislation. I met with my Senator, Stacy Guerin last February 2024 while lobbying, and expressed these same concerns. Senator Guerin stated that we needed great teachers in our schools, that she was proud to see young teachers here in Maine, and shared that she was a former teacher herself. She agreed that teachers are underpaid, and that was the very reason that she left the profession.

We need to find the funds to support this legislation, and make raising teacher salaries a priority. It is critical to making sure that we can offer high quality public education for Maine students, and continue to strengthen Maine's workforce by not only honoring those who have put so much into the profession, but also working to recruit the next generation of Maine's teachers.