

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Michelle Brann. I work at Spruce Mountain HS as a Social Studies teacher, and I live in Winthrop where my children attend high school and middle school. I am here today to testify in support of LD 34, "An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers." Like many school districts, RSU 73 has struggled to recruit and retain young teachers at a time when we are facing a historic teacher shortage. In the past, we have benefited from our proximity to the University of Maine at Farmington and its fantastic teacher education program. It was not uncommon for UMF students to complete their practicum and student teaching placements in our schools and then join us as full time staff upon completing their degree and certification. In fact, if you survey our current pre-k-12 teaching staff, you will find that the majority of them graduated from UMF.

Unfortunately that pattern is becoming less and less common with UMF graduating fewer and fewer certified teachers each year. I can say with first-hand knowledge, based on the conversations that I have with my students each year, that more and more high school students are declining to go into teacher education programs largely because they do not see teaching as a feasible path to success. I have many high school students who have spent their summers, weekends, and afternoons working, mentoring, and volunteering with younger children through our district's Lego League Team, 21st Century Grant after-school program, Summer Recreation Program, and Parenting and Child Development electives. These are the same students who historically would have gone on to major in education programs, and they now admit they are choosing different career paths because they don't believe a teacher's salary is enough to support the life they want for themselves in adulthood. UMF education students who do complete practicums and student teaching internships in our district rarely apply for our open positions upon graduating because they can only afford to live on a beginning teacher's salary if they move back in with their parents in other parts of the state and country. It's this lack of applicants that has required us to fill open positions with long term subs - in just the last two years, we've had to use long term subs or ed techs to fill high school health, elementary school music, and special education classrooms across all grades for entire school years because of a lack of certified teacher applicants.

I realize that teacher pay is not the only barrier to attracting quality teacher candidates, but it is an important step, perhaps the most important step, in the right direction. I hope you will give this bill your support and demonstrate your commitment to ensuring quality education for all of our public school students.