



Testimony by Jason Judd, Executive Director, Educate Maine

In Support of LD 34, An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers

Wednesday, February 26, 2025, 10 A.M.

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Jason Judd, the Executive Director of Educate Maine. Our organization is a business-led nonprofit focused on increasing education attainment for Maine people to meet the demands of our economy. I am writing to express my support for LD 34, An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers. This legislation is a necessary step toward addressing Maine's persistent teacher shortage and ensuring that every student has access to high-quality educators. As we heard during the Teach Maine Center community forums in all 16 counties of Maine, compensation plays a significant role in both attracting and retaining educators, and increasing the minimum teacher salary is a critical investment in the future of Maine's schools.

Maine educators have consistently voiced their concerns about the financial challenges they face. Many early-career teachers struggle to make ends meet, with some taking on second jobs or leaving the profession altogether due to inadequate pay. During our forums, we heard from passionate teachers who love their work but find it increasingly difficult to remain in the profession. One educator shared, "I'm committed to my students, but I can't afford to stay in this field much longer." Another spoke about the disparities between teacher salaries and those of similarly credentialed professionals in other fields, making it clear that low wages are a major deterrent for new teachers entering the workforce.

One teacher shared that despite working full-time, they had to take on weekend shifts at a retail store just to cover their bills. "I spend my weekdays shaping young minds and my weekends stocking shelves—it's exhausting." Another educator from a rural district described how low pay had made it difficult to recruit and retain teachers, leading to larger class sizes and overburdened staff. "We've had to combine grade levels and cut electives because we just can't keep teachers," they explained.

A veteran teacher expressed their frustration with the pay scale, noting that despite decades of experience, their salary remained below what entry-level positions in other professions offered. "I love teaching, but financially, it would have made more sense for me to leave years ago." Similarly, a recent college graduate who wanted to teach in Maine described their heartbreak at having to look out of state for better pay. "I grew up here, I want to give back to my community, but I can't afford to do that on a teacher's salary."

Raising the minimum salary to \$45,000 in the 2026-2027 school year, with incremental increases leading to a cost-of-living adjustment beyond 2030, is a crucial move to make teaching a viable long-term career. Higher salaries will help stabilize our schools by reducing turnover, fostering

continuity in classrooms, and ensuring that students benefit from experienced and dedicated educators.

Furthermore, this bill acknowledges the financial strain on school districts by providing state support to help meet these salary increases. Ensuring that funding is available will allow districts, especially those in rural areas, to recruit and retain talented educators without compromising other essential resources.

LD 34 is a commitment to the educators who shape Maine's future. If we want to build a strong and sustainable teacher workforce, we must provide salaries that reflect the value of their work. Our board of directors includes more than a dozen Maine business leaders who understand the importance of having great schools to attract people to live and work in our communities. They understand the importance of the teaching workforce to make sure our local schools thrive. On behalf of our board of directors, I urge you to support this bill and take meaningful action to address Maine's teacher shortage and support our local communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.