

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

My name is Nathan Burnett. I live in Hiram, and have been a math and computer science teacher at Sacopee Valley High School, in Southern Maine for 13 years. I am the vice president of Tri-County Teachers Association. I am here today to testify in support of LD 34, An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers.

Recruit and retain. That's what both sides of the table in my last negotiations worked towards. 50k minimum educator salary will help districts to do that.

Many districts are facing openings and shortages of staff across the state. My district, with just shy of 100 teachers, has had one such opening all year and almost had had three. One of those last minute hires involved hiring from another district, and I don't know if that opening was then filled. When we do post job openings, the hiring committees that I've been a part of are lucky to get two applicants. Most I hear about have one candidate. This is unsustainable.

We are constantly seeing movement to higher paying school districts and professions from within education. In my 13 years of teaching, all at the same district, I stopped keeping track of colleagues who have left the because it just became too depressing. This causes constant demand of our mentorship programs and loss of institutional knowledge. To speak of the lack of experienced educators, in my 6th year of teaching I was asked to become one of our mentor teachers with 5 years of experience. Constantly having to integrate new staff into the close-knit community of a school is a challenge for everyone, students and teachers alike.

Many of our students are too young to see the difficult choices the adults in their lives are making around staying put and being a positive role model and constant in their lives, or moving to greener pastures to actually be able to save up for a house.

In my own case, to save for a house, my wife and I rented an old farm house, with only a decorative gas stove for a heat source. Yes, the rent was cheap, but we got what we paid for. The shower was left to drip in the winter to not freeze, and water glasses would freeze when left by the bedside table. But we did it. We saved up 20% of a 180,000 loan, but we were only able to make the payments work because mortgage rates were 3.125%. I reran my mortgage if I were to apply for it today. At 7.125%, my mortgage today would be 57% higher. Does anyone think we'll see those sorts of rates again?

At my school, again, with a staff of around 100 teachers, and if you assume a career of 40 years, that means we should see the retirement of 2-3 teachers each year. We are not graduating 2-3 students interested in teaching. Last year my school had zero education-major/minor graduates. The year before, I believe it was one student. My students will say to my face and in front of the rest of their classmates "Why would I become a teacher? You aren't paid well. I want more for my life."

While I am in the business of convincing people that education is important, it's not exactly within the scope of my mathematical certification to qualify worth, or make judgement calls about how we spend the money we earn. There is more to life than making money and having the biggest boat, but it's hard to see that when you're treading water, holding onto flotsam.

There's that eternal joke about educators and what we make. The punchline that I truly believe and agree with is that "we make a difference" but it's important to note that it's WE make a difference. We need help getting people into the profession. 50k minimum salary would help with that.

Thank you for your time.