

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

My name is Tony Beaumier, and I live in South Berwick. I am a grade 6 language arts teacher at York Middle School. **I am here to testify to support LD 34, An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary in Maine.**

In my 42nd year of teaching, I have never been more concerned about the future of education in Maine. When I began teaching in the 1980s, the competition to secure a teaching job was intense. The available pool of teachers was vast. Today, this has changed. Many Maine teachers are retiring or quitting the profession, and fewer students are entering teaching programs.

What is causing this teacher shortage? Burnout, a lack of support, an escalation of challenging student behaviors, a diminished retirement system? All of these factors are in, but low teacher pay is the challenge I hear the most about.

A group of York teachers recently met with our local representative to discuss educational issues. We invited one of our young teachers with 6 years of experience to share how challenging it is to survive on his teaching and coaching salary. He currently makes \$62,000 a year. His wife is a paralegal, and they have two sons. After all of his expenses, he is left with about \$200 a month. The list of expenses he wrote up did not include things like putting four new tires on his car so that he could get an inspection sticker. Those expenses have to be paid for with a credit card.

Last week, his credit card was declined when he stopped to get food for dinner. It was maxed out. He had to use the credit card that his dad gave him for emergencies. He rents a small 2-bedroom condo - his third living arrangement in three years. He has to keep moving because every year his rent goes up. After a two-year unsuccessful search, he gave up trying to purchase a home in southern Maine within an hour's drive of our school. He

had to move from York to Eliot, uprooting his older son from the York schools. At one point, it sounded like he was apologizing because he chose to have children, knowing how expensive they are to raise. How sad that a young teacher would feel this way. Being a parent of three and learning from my experiences has helped me work with kids and parents over the years. He talks about leaving York to relocate to an affordable housing area. I would hate to see him go. It would be a real loss for our school and our students.

York, one of the highest-paid districts in Maine, is a destination school for teachers. A few years ago, getting 25-30 applicants for a teaching opening was typical. We could be selective and hire only those applicants with master's degrees and experience. Two years ago, we advertised for a special education teacher; we received one applicant.

The impacts of a teacher shortage include larger class sizes, increased teacher workload, and challenges in providing adequate student support - in a time when providing adequate student support after COVID has never been greater.

Maine will strive to put the best and brightest teachers in classrooms. Our kids don't get a second chance with their education. Many recent graduates choose not to use their education degrees because they feel that the pay doesn't reflect the time and effort needed for the job. Living paycheck to paycheck and barely getting by is not attractive. I'd like to say, *"Let's provide this pay bump to teachers to avoid an educational crisis,"* but the crisis is already here and will worsen if action is not taken now. Please support putting qualified teachers before Maine students by providing them with a living wage. Support LD 34.