

**Testimony of Beth White
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,
and the Committee on State and Local Government
10am Friday, February 28, 2025, State House Room 228 and Electronically**

**LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds
for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to
the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026
and June 30, 2027, (Emergency) (Governor's Bill),
Sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and members of the Committee on State and Local Government, I'm Beth White, director of politics and legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. We are a labor union representing over 13,000 Maine workers, including workers in all three branches of Maine State Government.

First, we support the numerous reclassifications, reorganizations, and range changes in the proposed biennial budget, some of which fall outside of MSEA bargaining units. We also support the creation of new positions and the continuation of limited period positions throughout various departments. Understaffing has been an ongoing concern across state government for many years, impacting both the workers providing critical services and the Mainers who rely on these services. While we appreciate the administration's efforts to address the challenges, there is still much more work to be done. The administration's proposed State Budget continues to fall short of what's needed to ensure quality services for all Maine people. Understaffing and vacancies throughout all departments of Maine State Government remain a serious problem. Examples from some worksites and departments, according to data provided by the Executive Branch as of November 2024:

- **Riverview Psychiatric Center:** 51 positions, or 25% of the 204 MSEA-SEIU-represented permanent and limited period positions at Riverview, were vacant as of November 2024. That's actually an improvement from April 2024 when 64 of 204 MSEA-represented positions were vacant, for a 31% vacancy rate. Because of such a high vacancy rate, staff at Riverview has been regularly forced into unsafe encounters with patients. This has frequently led to violent assaults on staff—often with life-changing consequences, including severe traumatic brain injuries.
- **Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center:** 8.5% vacancy rate for MSEA-represented permanent and limited period full-time positions as of November 2024. While this is an improvement from April 2024 when the vacancy rate was at 16%, all of these vacancies at both Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center and Riverview Psychiatric Center need to be filled immediately to ensure quality services and both staff and patient safety.

- **Maine Department of Labor:** 171 vacancies out of 583 positions for a vacancy rate of over 29%. This represents a worsening of the vacancy rate compared to April 2024 when there were 149 vacancies for a vacancy rate of 27%.
- **Maine DOT** 142 vacancies out of 634 positions for a vacancy rate of over 18%. This is actually an improvement over April 2024 when there were 166 vacancies for a vacancy rate of 22%.
- **Department of Veterans and Emergency Services:** 33 vacancies out of 198 positions for a vacancy rate of over 17%. That's a slight improvement of 2% from April 2024 when DVEM had 36 vacancies for a vacancy rate of 19%.
- **Department of Marine Resources:** 22 vacancies for a vacancy rate of 12.5%, a slight improvement from April 2024 when there were 28 vacancies for a vacancy rate of 16%.
- **Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry:** Excluding any seasonal positions, DACF had 46 non-seasonal vacancies out of 358 positions for a non-seasonal vacancy rate of 12.8%. These vacancies are mostly full-time positions, and they are making it difficult for the workers to provide the high level of quality services that Maine people and visitors to our great state deserve.
- **Department of the Secretary of State:** 33 vacancies out of 385 positions for a vacancy rate of 8.5%. That's down from April 2024 when there were 46 vacancies for a vacancy rate of 12%.
- **Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife:** 17 vacancies for a vacancy rate of 10%, up slightly from April 2024 when there were 15 vacancies for a vacancy rate of 9%.

With understaffing continuing and the state employee pay gap remaining at 14% as of September 2024, which is an improvement of 1% in the last five years, you can see why we are extremely concerned about the Governor's proposal (Part R) to remove nearly \$44 million from the State's personnel budget and transfer that amount into the General Fund, where it would be used for other purposes. The administration proposes to more than triple the state employee attrition rate, from 1.6% to 5%, in both the Executive and Judicial branches of Maine State Government, in order to justify this proposed financial maneuver. The State's own studies show that state workers remain substantially underpaid compared to their public and private sector counterparts throughout Maine and New England. I'd like to draw your attention to the State's most recent State of Maine Market Pay Report, dated Sept. 30, 2024,¹ which puts the state employee pay gap at 14%. Again, this is the State's own study. Please also see the related memo² that we presented to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee on Oct. 8, 2024, detailing our response to the State's Market Pay Report dated Sept. 30, 2024.

The money in the State's Salary Plan is there to fund budgeted positions and to close the state employee pay gap, and it shouldn't be used as a piggybank to fund other priorities. We'd like to respectfully remind you that Part PPP of the Supplemental Budget passed by the Legislature and signed into law on April 22,

1. <https://mseaseiu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/State-of-Maine-Market-Pay-2024-Report.pdf>
2. <https://mseaseiu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/10-8-24-MSEA-response-on-State-Market-Pay-Report.pdf>

2024, expressly authorizes the administration to use all funds in the State's Salary Plan to negotiate with us over the implementation of a new compensation and classification system for Executive Branch workers—and those negotiations are ongoing. The administration's proposal to transfer nearly \$44 million from the State's personnel budget into the General Fund appears to be an attempt to end run Part PPP. We ask that you reject this change and ensure these resources are used to address these serious recruitment and retention issues.

We respectfully ask that you address the state employee pay gap so that the State can recruit and retain state workers. Their work is so essential and beneficial to Maine's working families, our communities and our economy.

Thank you and I'd be glad to answer any questions.

MAINE SERVICE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION, SEIU LOCAL 1989
RESPONSE TO THE STATE OF MAINE'S MARKET PAY REPORT

To: Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
Committee on State and Local Government

From: MSEA-SEIU Local 1989

Date: October 8, 2024

On Monday, September 30, 2024, the Commissioner of Finance and Administration released its Market Pay Report ("State Report") detailing its review of salaries of employees of the State of Maine's Executive Branch ("State") in relation to the broader labor market.

The primary takeaway is that, while the Mills Administration has done better than prior administrations, the State has still made no real progress in closing the pay gap that exists between State workers and employees in the broader labor market.

Specifically, the State Report shows that the **average State worker is now earning 86% of the market rate, up from 85% in 2020.**¹

Maine State government is plagued by vacancies, with devastating effects on the public that relies on services. The State is unable to fill vital positions to ensure that State ferries can run, that youths in state custody at Long Creek Youth Development Center are adequately served, that phone calls to Maine DHHS eligibility specialists are answered without two-hour hold times, and that the thousands of children served by the Office of Child and Family Services receive the services they need.

In many instances, understaffing poses a significant risk to State employees. For example, 64 of 204 MSEA-represented permanent and limited period full-time positions—or 31%—at Riverview are vacant.² As a result, staff is regularly forced into unsafe encounters with patients. This has frequently led to violent assaults on staff—often with life changing consequences, including severe traumatic brain injuries.

Accordingly, persistently below-market wages and the resulting staffing issues have devastating effects both on the public and on State workers, and it is imperative that the State make meaningful progress on closing the pay gap.

Unfortunately, as will be discussed below, **the State's Market Pay Report is likely a best-case scenario.** For example, the State Report reflects that the gap between State employees and the private sector has actually grown since 2019. Specifically, as detailed in the report, between 2019 and 2023, **private sector compensation grew by 26.3%, but compensation in State**

¹ See State Report, at page 5. Notably, the State Report also defines the gap based on the lower edge of market competitiveness, or 95% of the market average, and claims that the gap is at 9% rather than 14%. This is a transparent effort to move the goalposts—the pay gap should be based on the market average.

² This vacancy data is from information provided by the State to MSEA in April 2024, pursuant to an information request.

government grew by only 21.6%.³ However, despite citing these figures in the introductory section, the State did not factor these numbers into its final calculation of the overall pay gap.

This, combined with other analytical flaws (discussed below), suggests that the actual pay gap is likely larger than 14%.

Among the numerous issues with methodology and data in the State Report are the following:

- The State Report vastly overrepresents classifications that have already received market pay adjustments, which skews the overall findings toward the market average.
- The State failed to obtain data from a sufficient number of competitor employers.
- As a result, only a handful of the classifications reviewed meet the express sufficiency requirements for statistical significance.
- The State Report is overly reliant on the published survey sources, resulting in fictitious public sector positions and speculative salary data.

MSEA will address each of these issues below.⁴ MSEA will also offer its input on the path forward and the steps necessary to meaningfully address the pay gap.

1. The State Report overrepresents classifications that have already received market pay adjustments, which skews the overall average.

The State Report reviews 74 benchmark classifications—slightly less than the 82 reviewed in the Segal Report in 2020.⁵ **However, the State’s criteria for selecting benchmark classifications did not ensure that it was capturing a balanced representation of workers.**

Specifically, while Segal selected benchmark classifications based on the number of positions within and adjacent to the particular classification, the State selected their benchmark classifications based on two factors.

First, they selected the most populated positions in each administrative unit. Second, they selected positions based on the highest stipend amount in each administrative unit.⁶ Pay stipends are adjustments made to positions via either a statutory recruitment and retention process, legislative mandate, or collective bargaining, and they are meant to address understaffing by bringing salaries closer to the market average.

³ See State Report, at pages 16-17. As State Economist Amanda Rector previously explained to MSEA, this definition of “State employee” includes all three branches of government, as well as the UMaine System and the Maine Community College System.

⁴ Since last Spring, the State and MSEA met regularly to discuss the parameters of the State’s review. MSEA has previously raised each of these issues with the State during these meetings.

⁵ Notably, the State has previously argued that the Segal Report was not based on enough benchmark classifications.

⁶ See State Report at 18. In contrast, the Segal Report did not consider whether a position had a stipend when selecting benchmark classifications.

The vast majority of classifications in State government do not have pay stipends. However, due to the State's preference for reviewing positions with stipends, **a majority included in the State Report—39 of the 74 classifications—already have market pay stipends attached.** 5 of these classifications each contain a single position,⁷ and an additional 19 classifications have 10 employees or less.

As a result, one-third of the benchmark classifications—covering only 103 positions—already have a market pay adjustment increasing their salary by approximately 10 to 30%.

This vast overrepresentation of classifications with large market pay adjustments already applied automatically skews the overall average closer to the market average. **A more balanced approach that does not overrepresent positions with stipends would likely reflect a much larger pay gap.**

2. The State failed to obtain data from a sufficient number of competitor employers.

In 2009, the State commissioned a market pay report from the Crescendo Consulting Group ("Crescendo Report"). The **Crescendo Report** utilized data obtained directly from **more than 250 private and public sector employers.** Classifications with at least 8 total matches from these peer employers were included in the Crescendo Report.

The **2020 Segal Report** relied on data obtained directly from 12 public sector employers, and then utilized three separate published survey sources as a proxy for the broader private sector market, for a total of **fifteen unique sources of information.** Classifications with at least 5 total matches from the peer employers or published survey sources were included in the Segal Report.

Here, the State adopted the same sufficiency requirement as Segal—specifically, it sought five matches for each benchmark classification.⁸ However, the State obtained data from **four public sector employers and two published survey sources—meaning they had only six potential sources of information from which to find at least five matches.**

3. As a result, only a handful of the classifications reviewed meet the express sufficiency requirement for statistical significance.

Unfortunately, in most cases, the State did not have a sufficient number of matches from the public sector comparators.

- 8 positions had 0 matches among the peer employers
- 17 positions have 1 direct match
- 41 positions had 2 direct matches
- 8 positions had 3 direct matches

⁷ Building Maintenance Superintendent, Computer Operations Assistant Manager, IT Business Analyst, Occupational Therapist, Systems Group Manager.

⁸ See State Report at page 21 ("To meet data sufficiency requirements, selected benchmark classifications were required to meet a threshold of five (5) matches across all selected comparators...")

- No position had 4 direct matches

Thus, only 8 classifications—those with the three direct matches plus the two public survey sources—had a sufficient number of matches for inclusion in the State Report.

4. The State Report is overly reliant on the published survey sources, resulting in fictitious public sector positions and speculative salary data.

Faced with a lack of relevant data directly from peer employers, the State generated purportedly employer-specific data from the published survey sources and ascribed it to specific public sector employers, including five cities, six states, and the Federal government, as well as the general “private sector” market in various states.

While the published survey sources are useful for generating general data for the broad labor market—which is how Segal utilized this type of data—the State’s attempt to use this data as proxy for specific peer employers generated flawed results.

a. The published survey data for purported “public sector” workers does not include data from any of the relevant state governments.

During discussions about the data prior to the release of the State Report, the State informed MSEA that the two published survey sources, CompAnalyst and ERI, collect data on a voluntary basis from employers, and that neither company had received data from the relevant state governments—**meaning that the purported “public sector” survey data for Maine, Idaho, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont does not actually include the salaries of workers employed by those states.** Rather, the State informed MSEA, it believes that the data is pulled from other public respondents, such as the Federal government, counties, and municipalities—although it couldn’t confirm which public sector employers had responded.⁹

This is significant because, in many instances, the work performed by State workers is of a much different breadth and scope than municipal or county workers. For example, State Eligibility Specialists are charged with working with a whole host of State and Federal programs, including MaineCare, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Child Support, Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment, Social Security Disability, and General Assistance. County and municipal employees would only be handling General Assistance. Accordingly, a municipal “Family Services Advisor”—as they are listed in the State’s data set¹⁰—would not be a valid match for a State Eligibility Specialist.

b. Similarly, in many instances, the purported private sector matches are not true corollaries.

⁹ Further, after MSEA noted that preliminary data included reference to public sector ferry employees in Lewiston, the State reached out to ERI, who told them that their municipal data was not reliable. Accordingly, the State removed ERI’s municipal data from the final Report. However, as will be discussed below, the State Report still treats a number of fictitious positions, with corresponding fictitious salaries, as matches.

¹⁰ See Comprehensive Market Data by Bargaining Unit 2024 at page 41.

Just as many State classifications have no true corollary at the municipal or county level, many public sector jobs have no true match in the private sector. For example, the State used the published data sources to generate purported private sector “corrections officers” in Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. However, none of those states operate private sector prisons – and therefore should not have private sector “corrections officers.”¹¹

Similarly, there are no real private sector equivalents for an Emergency Communications Specialist—the State’s 911 operators. There may be private sector Emergency Dispatch Operators¹² that dispatch security guards, ambulances, or tow-trucks—but they would not be coordinating law enforcement responses while walking the caller through a crisis situation or instructing them how to perform CPR or other life-saving procedures.

c. The State Report relies on fictitious positions and speculative salary data generated from the published survey sources.

Upon closer review the State’s data, it is apparent that their use of the published survey sources to populate positions at specific employers generated fictitious positions and speculative salary data.

To use one specific example, the State Report includes salary data for a “Chemist III” employed by the City of Lewiston (“Lewiston”).¹³ However, not only is there no “Chemist III” employed by Lewiston, there is no classification that is even a rough approximation of a Chemist III.¹⁴ Given that Lewiston does not employ a Chemist III, the purported salary data ascribed thereto is entirely speculative.

Going further, among the 73 purported classifications identified by the State with actual positions in Lewiston,¹⁵ there are only 22 actual titles that are roughly approximate to the purported matches. The remaining 51 positions identified as matches are non-existent.

The salary data ascribed to the various public sector positions is also suspect on its face. For example, the State Report indicates that Portland and South Portland have the exact same pay

¹¹ See <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/private-prisons-in-the-united-states/> (detailing private prison population by state).

¹² See Comprehensive Market Data by Bargaining Unit 2024, at page 43.

¹³ See Comprehensive Market Data by Bargaining Unit 2024 at page 92.

¹⁴ The various collective bargaining agreements covering Lewiston’s workforce include position titles, and none include any title related to a Chemist III. See <https://www.lewistonmaine.gov/182/Labor-Agreements>. Similarly, while the report also suggests the existence of the “Chemist III” classification in Augusta, Bangor, Portland, and South Portland, MSEA can find no evidence that any of these cities employs anyone in a roughly equivalent classification.

¹⁵ The State Report indicates that there was “no match” for one of the 74 classifications.

range for the cities' respective "Chemist III" classifications.¹⁶ Given that Portland and South Portland are distinct employers with separate bargaining units, classification structures, and pay scales, it would be a wild coincidence if the salaries for their respective "Chemist III" classifications matched exactly to the dollar—indeed, if the Chemist III classifications even exist at all. Looking more broadly at the entirety of the State's data, however, one can see that the published surveys indicate that Portland and South Portland have identical salaries for 58 of the 74 classifications reviewed.

This is beyond belief. **Taken as a whole, it is apparent that public sector employer-specific data generated from the published survey sources is not based in reality.** Rather, these are fictitious positions and speculative salary ranges. It seems to be projections of what a particular classification's salary range would look like in a particular labor market, rather than precise data drawn from the actual employers referenced.

5. The State Report makes various other questionable assertions.

Throughout the Report, the State posits various conclusions and assertions that simply do not hold up under scrutiny. While none of these assertions change the State Report's primary finding that State workers remain significantly underpaid compared to our peer competitors, it is still worth addressing a couple of them.

First, in describing the non-salary benefits enjoyed by Maine State employees, the State asserts that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the States of Rhode Island and Vermont do not offer paid parental leave. This is not accurate. Specifically, by statute, Massachusetts allows 26 weeks of paid family and medical leave per year.¹⁷ Similarly, Rhode Island allows four weeks of paid parental leave under its "Temporary Caregiver Insurance" program,¹⁸ and Vermont offers up to six weeks of paid parental leave through its Voluntary Paid Family and Medical Leave plan.¹⁹

Second, the State Report touts the Bureau of Human Resources' role in implementing over 3,000 reclassifications since 2019, which, it writes, ensures that "State employees are paid at the classification matched to their work efforts." However, this is a misleading argument.

- Of the roughly 3,000 Functional Job Analysis forms that have been processed since 2019, only 1,600 of those were approved reclassifications or range changes.
- The remaining 1,500 were for newly created positions, were denied, or were withdrawn or otherwise cancelled.
- Of the 1,600 approved reclassification or range changes, approximately 600 were lateral reclassifications, "updates" or modifications to the existing title, or position downgrades.

¹⁶ *Id.* at page 92 (showing the pay range for a "Chemist III" in both Portland and South Portland to be \$71,968.00 to \$113,672.00).

¹⁷ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/paid-family-and-medical-leave-pfml-overview-and-benefits>

¹⁸ <http://ripaidleave.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Fast-Facts-for-Workers-about-RI-TCI.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.metlife.com/insurance/disability-insurance/paid-family-medical-leave/states/vermont/>

- The vast majority of the remaining FJAs were either reclassifications of vacant positions or Transportation Workers who have completed the training needed to “hurdle” to the next position in the Transportation Worker Series.

Accordingly, the number of workers who have benefitted from reclassifications is a mere fraction of the figure cited in the State Report.

Moreover, to the extent that the State suggests that the reclassification process ensures that workers are being appropriately paid, given the existence of the 14% pay gap identified in the State Report and the fact that the State has not completed a Classification Study in decades, it is fair to say that State employees are not being paid commensurate with either their work efforts or their market value.

6. Next Steps

As discussed above, the State Report identifies a pay gap of approximately 14%, a slight improvement over the 15% pay gap identified in the 2020 Segal Report. However, given the data issues identified above and the widening gap between public and private sector employees, the actual pay gap is likely wider.

Also, as is clear from the State Report, the pay gap is not felt equally by all employees. Rather, the data reflects that while certain classifications earn as little as 61% of the market average, salaries for other classifications appear to be above the market average. Accordingly, “one-size-fits-all” across-the-board pay increases will not satisfactorily address the issue. Rather, it will be necessary to target particular classifications that are below market.

The State and MSEA are scheduled to meet in mid-October to begin bargaining implementation of the State Report, and the State has already committed to using funding available through the salary plan during this calendar year, so we are hopeful that some progress can be made.

Unfortunately, however, while the State Report is useful for identifying the pay gap overall, as well as the impact on particular broad groups of employees, the State Report does not contain sufficient data to truly address the issue.

Pursuant to a prior Settlement Agreement with MSEA, the State has agreed to retain a third-party consultant to complete a comprehensive Classification Study by the end of 2025. If the Legislature and the State are serious about tackling this issue, then it is necessary to further fund and mandate an independent and professional market pay study to dovetail with the third-party Classification Study.

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Aaron Sheridan, from Cushing. I work as a Captain with the Maine State Ferry Service. I am here on my own time in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

I am a 19 year employee of the state and enjoy my job. When I first started with the Ferry Service, my pay was not of industry standard, however the lower cost of benefits helped out in weighing these issues for me. Over the years the pay has increased, but also so has the cost of our benefits and recently the cost of living has gone out of control, far outpacing our wages. As a licensed Mariner, 1600-ton Master, I am in charge of one of the most expensive pieces of equipment that the state owns, roughly \$15,000,000 and I carry the most precious cargo that any vessel can carry, people. The captains and crew provide safe passage in all types of weather, fog, wind, snow for example.

Over the past few years, we have been battling constantly with crew shortages. One classification will fill up, then another will not have enough. Recently the ferry service has had to tie up boats due to manning. We have been told by HR that since all the boats have full time Captains, we do not have a Captain manning issue. We have had Captains that have had a hard time getting reliefs for vacations and are close to losing their vacation time due to shortages of manpower. Right now, we have a vacant Captains position that has yet to be filled.

I find it very unfair that Able Seaman and Engineers have received ample increases to their pay via stipends, and were able to receive a retention bonus just for showing up to work. The captains were offered a retention bonus if we worked three 80-hour work rotations, this means being home 1 week a month, not caring about the home life of my fellow Captains. This could be fixed and made right if the State finally fixes our broken classification system.

In the past, I have made personal sacrifices to make sure that the boats would keep running. I would fill in at any position that I am licensed, for the sake of the Islands we represent, and the people who depend on us to maintain this service. This isn't only me making tough sacrifices, other Captains have to do the same, but we are not worthy of the same treatment. I am in favor of anybody receiving increases to their pay, but I think that if one employee receives a 30% stipend and the other 3%, something is wrong, I just want to be treated equally and fairly considering my personal efforts and the efforts of the other Captains.

Dedication to my job and to the Island communities has been of utmost importance to me and I hope you can see that, we have specialized skills, licenses and experiences that we bring to the table, pay us and treat us accordingly. Please ask any nay sayers to do their research and recognize our worth! Please support LD2121! Thank you for your time.

Captain Aaron Sheridan
1600 ton Master
Cushing, Maine

Amanda Bailey
Lubec
LD 2121

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on state and local government. Good afternoon. My name is Amanda Bailey. I am proud to serve the people of Maine as an eligibility specialist for OFI. I am a resident of Lubec. I'm here to speak in support of LD2121.

OFI serves about a third of Mainers. One out of every 9 residents receives food stamps and 410k are on MaineCare. I believe there are about 400 eligibility specialist positions in the state of Maine. We have an incredibly complex position which requires mastery of both technology and policy. Around 25% of these 400 positions are constantly either in the initial nine month training period or open. The reason for this is quite simple. My job is not classified correctly. My first clue to that fact was coming in at step 3 on the pay scale. My next was being bumped up to step 4 a few months later because they couldn't find enough people to hire at step 3. I've been with the state a little over two years now, and I am at step 6. I have three more raises before I am topped out and the third only because my union won it in the last contract. The very fact that the position starts at step 4 speaks to the degree to which it is misclassified. I am interested in learning what kind of mental gymnastics it takes to start us at step 4 and then turn around and tell us our job is classified correctly. When I read that the administration is arguing no pay gap exists I became even more interested. Granted I am not a statistician but I can do basic math. The cost of living in Maine is 18.2% less than that of Massachusetts. My job tops out at \$89,600 there, about 40% more than current top out here. That doesn't sound like parity to me. Rhode Island has a very similar cost of living to Maine. I didn't see an open position and pay for my job there, which is not surprising since the receptionists at the DHS there top out at \$5k a year more than I do. That sure doesn't sound like parity to me. And the truth is that this lack of parity keeps us bleeding workers in the southern part of the state. Even in our office we've had turnover. People finish the Medicaid and Food Stamp training and leave this job because it is too much work for the pay. It just is. And the results are damning for Mainers. We are talking about food and healthcare here. These are necessities. As a historian who studied social class and poverty extensively while earning my masters, I understand the importance of these programs on a level most likely don't. I believe in what I do. It pains me to see people do without food or medical care because we just can't get time to update their cases or as is happening more and more often, a mistake is made by some half-trained contract worker leading to loss of benefits, which for some seniors can even mean loss of part of their social security benefits to Medicare Part B premiums. These things are a direct result of the low pay for the job we do.

As for the workload? It's insane. Quite frankly my coworkers and I are drowning. The contract workers aren't the answer. I wish you could read the case notes and see the work I see so that it could be made plain they aren't the answer. One Saturday the first 8 cases I touched were full of simple errors, most involving figuring out the 30th day of application. Overtime isn't the answer. It's nice, and I sure need the money, but it's not sustainable. I'm exhausted already. We all were before it even started because we are wearing ourselves out trying to keep up. The answer is higher pay for this position so we can hire and retain workers. It's obviously a known issue or we wouldn't start at step 4. And on a personal note, I need the hope of more money. I can't top out in three years. It is not enough pay for the work. It is not enough money to ever live anything but paycheck to paycheck. And no one is going to want that forever, which is why most new workers don't stay in this position. Nearly everyone I trained with appears to be gone. I am a little different. I love my job. I enjoy the complexity of the job. Furthermore I am good at my job. I want to keep doing it, and I want to keep doing it in Maine. I am here today asking you to make that possible.

I ask you to vote in favor of LD2121. Thank you.

February 8, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government,

I am submitting testimony on my own time in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine.

I'd like to address the importance of funding public services and addressing continued retention issues. I have been a state employee working for DHHS for over 26 years. The importance of funding public services and retention continues to be a concern.

During my years of state service, I have seen high to impossible caseloads, lack of resources, lack of support from management, and lack of training to support the job. To continue to provide quality services, it is important to provide funding to retain and attract well qualified workers. It is important to stay competitive with the private sector. I have seen people leave because they have found jobs that have better benefits and/or salary as well as less stress due to more manageable job duties.

DHHS has been an ever-evolving system with changes in management, direction of services, changes in technology, and policy. As a state employee, this is very challenging to continue to manage on a direct-care level.

The need to adequately fund public services can make a difference in the quality, longevity of workers, the amount of experience state employees have, and attract more qualified workers.

I urge you to support LD 2121, address the pay gap in comparison to other states, adequately fund and prevent staff shortages, and ensure adequate resources such as training and technology.

Amy Hill, Augusta

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Carney Williams. I'm writing in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

I am a nurse and work for DHHS, Division of Licensing. I have held this job for over 30 years.

In that time I have watched about 10 individuals leave to take jobs with higher pay. We have lost valuable people.

Retention and recruitment is difficult. I obviously love my job and it certainly is not related to the salary I am paid.

It saddens me that the Governor does not value her employees and doesn't care that we get paid less than we deserve.

I see people that I work with going without lunch because they feel that they can't afford it! That is sad.

Some of my fellow coworkers go without needed medication and that is even sadder.

It's time that the Legislature recognizes what State employees need! LD 2121 is essential to all State employees and their families. Let us all know that you care about us and our wellbeing. Please support and work to pass this legislation.

Thank you.

Carney Williams
Winter Harbor

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Cheryl Blyther-Guay, resident of the town of Northfield. I'm here on my own time to speak in support of LD2121.

I am an eligibility specialist for the Office of Family Independence of the Department of Health and Human Services. My job was to determine eligibility for the SNAP and MaineCare programs but for the past year been part of Quality Control. I love my job. When I was hired it was understood that it takes about a year to be fully trained. I had to learn a 3-inch binder's worth of policy for MaineCare and an additional 3-inch binder's worth of policy for the SNAP program, in addition to immigration policy as it pertains to state and federally funded programs, self-employment tax records, etc. This is not a job that just anyone can step in easily. It is a challenge to recruit and train qualified candidates to completion. Often, we lose our trainees before they even complete their full year of training, moving on to other jobs that pay more for the same type of skill set.

We are chronically understaffed statewide. It is not uncommon for individuals to call our customer service number and wait 3 to 4 hours or more to speak to an eligibility worker to apply for benefits, ask questions about their benefits, or report changes to their case. I see on a regular basis in the case record where a client will call 5 or 6 times in an attempt to complete a mandatory interview or report changes to their case only to be put on hold again for an eligibility specialist or worse yet, be told that the phone queue has reached the limit and they will have to call back, or have the phone queue shut down completely due to a high call volume. Currently eligibility staff are working an abundance of overtime to just keep up with the flood of applications and recertifications that are coming in. We cannot sustain this pace. We do not have enough workers to keep up with the workload. We are drowning and we need help. We are not attracting and retaining qualified candidates, because we are not paying anywhere near what the private sector has to offer. I would like to express the dire need on behalf of myself, my co-workers, and the residents of Maine who we serve to bridge the pay gap. I ask for your support of LD2121.

February 6, 2024
Support LD2121

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the State and Local Government Committee.

I'm Captain Daniel Michael McNichol with the Maine State Ferry Service (MSFS). I am here on my own time to speak in support of LD2121.

I have been with the Maine State Ferry Service for nearly 23 years. During my tenure I have witnessed dozens of well qualified crew members depart the Maine State Ferry Service because our pay structure – it is far below the industry standard paid to professional merchant mariners. Most of the mariners that work for MSFS need to be in a place in their lives that allows them the freedom and ability to work and remain with the MSFS.

I have had the honor and pleasure to work as the Port Captain in Rockland for many years. In this role, I oversaw making sure the Ferries were staffed up and running to avoid any schedule interruptions. This was extremely difficult, and I had to ask many of my fellow mariners to work overtime and change their schedules to keep things operating. When I was in this role, this really tested our ability to be flexible and it came at the cost of crew members sacrificing time off. Many crew members have lost and continue to lose their earned vacation time because management has said we can't take that time due to operational need.

Most of the mariners I work with are tired of traveling out of state or the country for employment. So they look to be home in Maine and accept substandard wages. The American merchant mariner is a rare breed, and are becoming scarcer and older by the day. Mariners are much harder to hire and retain. Extra and fair compensation would assist our operations tremendously.

I currently have a daughter in Tufts University Medical School for her MD. Higher wages would also help me assist her with her struggles through Med school. We all know that Maine needs more qualified physicians.

Please support LD2121. Thank you.

Captain Daniel McNichol
Rockland, Maine

February 8, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Maine Legislature's Committee on State and Local Government,

I'm Dave Boudreau of Holden. I'm writing to you as a private citizen on my own time and as a member of my union, the Maine Service Employees Association. I'm asking you to support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine.

I work as a Transportation Worker III for the MaineDOT, a job I've held since November of 2019. I'm writing to tell you there's a real problem with recruiting and retaining MaineDOT workers, and it's mostly because of the State's low pay. Study after study have shown that the State pays us far below what other public and private sector workers throughout Maine and New England are paid for the same work. The fact is, the State just can't get the people to come in or stay at these jobs because of the low wages. This problem is getting worse, not better.

Don't take my word for it on the State's low wages. Please read the 2020 State of Maine Market Study Report. It shows that state workers on average are underpaid by 15% and that maintenance mechanics for the State of Maine are actually underpaid by 31 percent. An earlier study that the State commissioned back in 2009 reached similar conclusions.

There's been a lot of talk in the Maine Legislature about the need for more funding for infrastructure like roads and bridges, and it's great to see funding for more infrastructure in the current State Budget. However, how is the State going to get all that work done without a qualified and experienced MaineDOT workforce? MaineDOT keeps losing workers to better-paying employers both in the private sector and at cities and towns statewide. If MaineDOT wants to have the workforce it needs to maintain our network of roads and bridges, and to carry out all the infrastructure projects in the works, then the State must end the State Employee Pay Gap. Please do your part to help make that happen by supporting and funding LD 2121 to provide the funding necessary to end the State Employee Pay Gap. Maine State Government must implement and fund the 2020 State compensation and classification study. Thank you.

Dave Boudreau
Holden

February 7th, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Gaven Speirs from Oxford, Maine. I am here on my own time to speak in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

While I have only been working with MaineDOT's Poland Camp as a transportation worker for a short time, the impact of short staffing my co-workers have talked about are astonishing to me. Six people have recently left or moved to other jobs. We have a small crew as it is. There is a regular and quick turnaround for people getting their licenses here and then going to higher paying jobs elsewhere. This makes it harder on the people that stay to work longer hours under stress and fatigue. This creates a negative environment that causes even more workers to leave due to the pay not being worth the conditions of being over worked this dangerous line of work.

Having to work for long hours is dangerous. Without a full crew, it is common for my coworkers (ranging from 40-60 years of age) to work upward of 32 hours per shift when operational needs call for us to stay on the road. They all, we all wish for fairer wages but don't leave due to the time we have invested in MaineDOT. We take pride in our work, but no new people seem to join or stick around. The majority of the issues we are experiencing can be resolved by fixing the compensation and classification issues.

Please pass LD 2121. Thank you for your time.

Gaven Speirs
Oxford, Maine.

James Bailey
Hampden
LD 2121

In Support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions, Sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine

February 2, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, I'm James Bailey, a licensed social worker employed at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center and president of the Maine Service Employee Association Local 1989 chapter that represents the hospital. I am submitting this testimony on my own time in support of LD 2121 and to highlight the needs of the hospital.

Both State psychiatric hospitals routinely accept and treat many dangerous, mentally ill individuals in the state – individuals charged with aggravated assault, arson, sex crimes, attempted murder, and murder. Some of these patients have tragically already committed heinous crimes and are sent by criminal courts to restore their competence to face their charges or regarding their sanity. But it's possible that many crimes or tragedies are prevented by the hospitals' treatment for individuals before such an act occurs.

Our ability to provide effective treatment goes only so far as our ability to recruit and retain highly qualified, competent staff. When we have many vacancies, others are required to work overtime – sometimes forced – in order to maintain minimums. Staff get assigned more work, burnout increases, and then turnover – further encumbering those that remain. Standards inch lower, corners get cut. When patients have a crisis and require physical intervention, there are fewer staff available to show up. And of those that can, the average experience in safe restraint drops lower and lower. Patients get less individual attention, fewer opportunities to engage in treatment, and are forced to wait more and more. To maintain minimal staffing, the hospital runs between 70-90% capacity, unable to safely care for as many patients as we have beds.

Improving the effectiveness and robustness of the mental health system in Maine has recently been championed in bipartisan unity. And for good reason; it is one of the pillars of a safe community. And public safety is a basic function of state government and is brought about by the people who work for the State of Maine. For every bill passed, for every program created, for every resolution made, and for every benefit enacted it is the State of Maine workforce that makes it happen. And with continued, chronic understaffing, the vast network that makes up a safe community will suffer.

Please support LD 2121. Thank you for your time and consideration and feel free to follow-up with any questions you may have.

February 7th, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Jeffrey Doyon. I'm a resident of Winslow, Maine. I'm writing on my own time in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

I have worked for the State of Maine for 30 years. Over the years the State has gone through some budgetary issues where there was no room to negotiate for any type of cost-of-living increase, even though, like the State, my expenses have continued to increase due to the economy. But when the economy got better, our wages weren't looked at or adequately addressed. They are only looked at when the contracts are up - and when contracts expire and are up for negotiations, the past has not been addressed, we are still falling behind. This is not due to lack of effort on our part, we have tried to see this get fixed. There have been pay studies done because of these staffing shortages, but the studies have not been properly acted upon. Maine has kept state wages behind the private sector and behind the other states in the New England, there's no good reason for it. We are having major recruitment and retention issues due to the pay that is being offered. The work needs to be done, vacancies or not. The lack of staffing also causes delays in service and increases workers stress due to falling behind. LD2121 will greatly help fix this root issue with State government functionality.

LD 2121 would provide \$165 million in funding for a new compensation and classification system for State of Maine Executive Branch workers and close the state employee pay gap. The new compensation and classification system would address the fact that two studies, one in 2020 and the other in 2009, show that state workers are underpaid by 15%, on average, compared to their public and private sector counterparts in Maine and New England, and that it's even worse for classifications such as civil engineers, accountants, chemists, mechanics and correctional workers. This issue drives our staffing problems which get in the way of state agencies doing the best job we can to serve the people of Maine.

Please support LD 2121. We need better wages to keep staff and to be able to recruit well qualified people. Help us attract workers into working for the Department again so the vacancies can be filled and be staffed for the work that we need to do to. Help us help those who go to the State for help.

Jeffrey Doyon

February 6, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Jessie Ocasio, and I am an investigative worker at the Lewiston Maine DHHS office. I am writing to you in support of LD2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

The Lewiston DHHS office has an all-time high number of vacancies, and this is making it extremely difficult for the workers there to work safely and effectively. I have been employed in this office since 2019 and have never seen reports and vacancies this high. The high workloads, and number of vacancies cause me and my coworkers to work late and we are exhausted.

The number of caseworkers who leave after a short amount of time is also concerning. This causes a ripple effect and effects the efficiency of the caseworkers being able to fully assess child safety with our Maine families. I have heard numerous times that the caseworkers do not get paid enough to do the work we do.

I believe closing the pay gap will greatly assist retention and recruiting in our office, our department, and throughout state government. If the wages are higher and brought to a fairer rate, more qualified social workers/professionals willing join this workforce and be more willing to do the extreme work required for our positions. We need additional investments and resources from the state so DHHS can better serve the people who depend on our work.

I am writing to ask that you support LD2121.

Sincerely,

Jessie Ocasio
Dixfield, Maine

Legislature Testimony for LD2121

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, I'm Jodi Philippon. I am here in my own time to speak in support of LD 2121 and to implore you to please take heed of the testimony you are hearing today.

Over the past several months, I have listened to my fellow state employees relay a myriad of examples of chronic under-staffing, vacancies that remain unfilled, and qualified staff leaving state government with the root cause being a need for higher wages. The need for higher wages does not stem from greed or in any way take advantage of Maine's citizens, but rather, to pay essential costs of living to include rent, mortgage, childcare, and utilities to name a few. These departments include the Office of Children and Family Services, Ferry Services, and the CDC to name a few. In the five years I have worked at the Maine CDC, the medical secretary position in my office has been vacated 6 times.

I tried to recruit my best friend to apply for a Public Health Nurse position. She told me that she could not apply as the wages were far too low. Again, another qualified, capable person was lost.

Every time we lose a qualified employee, we also lose the knowledge, skills, and abilities that they bring to Maine State Government. We need to do better. The citizens of Maine deserve better. They need knowledgeable long-term employees, programs that are fully staffed, along with timely responses.

When Maine's citizens apply for much needed benefits and there is a staffing shortage, their need goes unanswered. People are made to wait excess time that they do not have to find out whether they might receive assistance. Children are put at risk as there are not enough child protective workers to manage the already overflowing caseloads. Others are forced to work mandatory overtime as there are so many unfilled positions.

Closing the pay gap will improve all the latter mentioned. I urge you to please support LD2121. Thank you for your time and attention.

Joe Sears
DOT workers
LD 2121

Good afternoon, Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government. I am Joe Sears from Penobscot County. I am here on my own time to speak in support of LD 2121.

I work as a Transportation Worker with MaineDOT. My department as a whole has many vacancies and because of the pay gap it is not attracting qualified candidates or retaining the knowledgeable staff who train them. This makes our hard work that much more challenging and it is a problem that can be resolved with the help of you and the rest of the legislature.

To reference my own personal struggle. One half of one month's wages is dedicated solely to my reliable commute to work. A ratio that does not leave extra for things like a hearty lunch on an extra-long work day. Nor a pair of rubber boots when working in water all day, a new pair of glasses to match the prescription I got last summer.

We need more staff. Please support LD 2121 because state workers are depending on it, and Maine is depending on us.
Thank you.

Katherine Nowicki

LD 2121

To whom it may concern,

I have been a 9-1-1 dispatcher for 9 years. In those years, I have dealt with every kind of call you could think of: medical emergencies, fires, stabbings, robberies, shootings, officers in danger, homicides, protests, child codes, and anything in between.

However, the most stressful aspect of my career has been the impact of critically short staffing in my center. It is my job to handle every situation that comes through the phone or the radio, but it becomes increasingly difficult when the work load of missing team members is added to my shoulders.

In the past 2 years I've seen "minimum staffing standards" disappear, and obscenely dangerous work conditions become acceptable. When there aren't enough people to staff 9-1-1 centers, calls go unanswered. People who need help reach no one. Officers and fire fighters find themselves in danger with no one able to hear their radio traffic when they end up in a fight, or when the phone lines are so overwhelmed that we can properly process that call to obtain scene safety information.

Add on top of that the increase in forced over time work hours and lack of sleep. In the past 1.5 years my coworkers and I average 64 work hours in 4 days. For those of you who can do the math, that is 16 hour shifts with 8 hour turn arounds. Imagine working 16 hours straight, having a 30-40 minute drive home, spending half an hour getting ready for bed and handling any house things that need to be done (pets, dishes, laundry, etc), another hour trying to fall asleep, 4 hours of sleeping, 2 hours to shower and commute back to work for 16 hours.

Can you function daily on 4 hours of sleep? Can you drive safely, can you make quick, life saving or like taking decisions?

That is what your 9-1-1 dispatchers have to do every day. How do you convince a new person to sign on to that kind of life? And I don't even know how people's with families or kids can put up with it.

I can also think of one specific example of when a call went unanswered because we just didn't have the people to answer: a neighbor in an apartment building was actively stabbing 2 people. There were 4 of us working when 5 people called 9-1-1 as they watched 2 people get stabbed. 4 people got to hear "9-1-1 what's the address of the emergency" and they knew someone was coming, and their cry for help was being heard. 1 caller never had that reassurance. In a room with 4 people, maybe 3 can answer the phone, but 1 person needs to radio the officers to neutralize the threat (and the victim isn't getting ab ambulance started right away, sorry but they're still on a 9-1-1 line). So one scared caller has no idea help is coming.

That is what the citizens face every day there are staffing shortages in 9-1-1 centers. This is one example of the hundreds that have occurred in the last 2 years.

You are in danger, the police officers and fire fighters are in danger.

Until the staffing crisis can be solved, my advice stay the same: don't call 9-1-1, there's no one left to answer.

February 7, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government,

My name is Kerem Gungor. I am a senior environmental engineer at DEP Bureau of Land Resources. I am writing this testimony to express my personal experience with engineer recruitment and share my personal thoughts with the Committee in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine.

I am currently supervising two environmental engineers and two assistant environmental engineers. I have one vacant assistant environmental engineer position in my team. The Bureau of Land Resources relies on my team's technical expertise to ensure that the land development projects are permitted in compliance with the state's stormwater regulations so that their impact on Maine's waters is mitigated.

Since I assumed this supervisory position in March 2022, I tried to recruit for the vacant environmental engineer position which requires the successful candidate to have a "professional engineer" license issued by the State Board of Licensure for Professional Engineers. None of the applicants was qualified for the position; hence, we could not move forward with interviews and fill the position. Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence. Before I assumed the senior environmental engineer position, the Bureau attempted to hire an environmental engineer. This attempt was also unsuccessful. Non-competitive salary is a major reason hampering recruitment. I must note that DEP provides 11% stipend on top of the base pay for the engineers. Even the pay augmented with this stipend does not attract qualified professionals.

Another evidence that demonstrates the non-competitive nature of the current pay schedule is as follows: successful candidates almost always negotiate to start at a higher step since Step 1 pay offered to new employees by policy is too low for most candidates to accept. Supervisory staff like me allocate a significant amount of their time into employee recruitment efforts and find themselves unable to fill vacancies due to the pay gap which is beyond their control. I believe that it is past time to address the pay gap and re-adjust the base pay schedules to eliminate the need for stopgap measures like providing stipends for the engineers.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my personal testimony on this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,
Kerem Gungor
Oakland

Kyle Parks
Portland
LD 2121

Greetings Committee Member(s):

I'm submitting my testimony in favor of LD 2121 electronically. I'm a state worker approaching my 5 year anniversary with the Maine CDC working in health promotion for the WIC program. I joined the WIC program, as a considerable salary cut for many of the same reasons my colleagues did; the sacrifice in pay (at the time) was a reasonable tradeoff to pursue a work-life balance while furthering the mission and vision of the Maine CDC and our own vision and mission at WIC.

Over the years, however, (particularly post-pandemic) the trade-off has become increasingly unrealistic. I find through conversation with my non-SOM friends and peers, I'm compensated far less than what those individuals would have thought. To apply for the position I hold with Maine CDC, a graduate-level degree was strongly encouraged (borderline required) which I possess, but I find the strongest reason I remain in SOM service is participation in the PSLF program. I absolutely rely on this program so that my graduate education investment can be paid for because SOM simply does not compensate workers at my level appropriately to not need this safety net and even with that benefit (which is not technically a direct benefit of working for SOM) the pathway to financial independence at any level in comparison to who were in my position 10-15 years ago is largely unattainable.

To allow myself to not stay financially stagnant, I work a 2nd job that takes up anywhere from 4-20 or more hours a week beyond my 40-hour work week. This is time I must prepare for that might otherwise go into my SOM work (physically or emotionally). It's having this additional income that allows me to contribute to supplemental retirement beyond the pension and lightly save for future homeownership (though that becomes more distant every waking day). It's discouraging and slightly embarrassing that to afford a reasonable lifestyle of the basics and hoping to not have roommates into my 40s that the only real viable option other than leaving SOM for a higher paying job is to work a second job a few days a week or more. Closing the pay gap and supporting LD 2121.

I truly hope you consider supporting this act so dignity can return to public sector work and we can get back to worrying less about financial stability and more about the Maine population that relies on our services.

Thank you,
Kyle Parks

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, I'm Lyric Deagle. I am here on my own time to speak in support of LD 2121.

I work for the DOT as a licensed civil engineer - my desk is actually about a quarter mile from this room. I am the primary designer on seven projects fixing Maine's failing and unsafe culverts, intersections, and roads and I feel like I'm making a difference every day. I really enjoy my job, and I would like to continue this work.

We've all heard Maine's transportation infrastructure is crumbling, but the structure of the MaineDOT itself is also degrading due to the lack of fair compensation offered to positions across the board. Personally, understaffing saddles me and other designers with additional projects that - in lieu of unpaid overtime - miss critical deadlines. I work closely with many other sections of Project Development who are also understaffed and the collaborative structure we depend on to deliver projects has started to break down. Project Development understands the inevitability of projects missing deadlines and guides us on which parts of Maine's infrastructure to let fall through the cracks. Some choices are easier than others, but deciding between road collapses and preventable fatal traffic accidents is both demoralizing and deeply frustrating.

When I started this job three years ago it was mentioned the person at my desk before me left for the private sector, and I can't say I blame them. On average a private sector Civil Engineer II makes 18% more than I do, and they are required to use the same design standards to do the same job I do every day.

Many of these jobs are fully remote, and the DOT simply cannot compete with the private sector for these jobs with our current wage structure. Ironically, many of the handsomely paid consultants complete almost half of DOT's Highway projects every year. This is happening and will continue if the State remains unwilling to fill their own vacancies. I'd bet it would be more affordable for the state to keep these jobs in house by offering MaineDOT workers fairer compensation than to continue this current practice of relying on outside groups. MaineDOT is already paying much higher wages to private, for-profit consultant engineering firms more to complete these projects - but not to those directly employed by the State. The money is there, but it is not going to the state's workforce. This is not efficient, and this all gets in the way of building up MaineDOT to our full potential and better deliver on our obligation to be good stewards of Maine's tax dollars and infrastructure.

By passing and fully funding LD 2121, the Maine State Legislature can give MaineDOT the resources required to do our jobs and carry out best practices in serving Maine's people, commuters, tourists, and travelers. Please support this legislation so we can recruit and retain qualified Engineers like myself. Your support for LD2121 can strengthen this Department and our ability to better take care of Maine's infrastructure.

Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Lyric Deagle
Brunswick, Maine
February 2024

**matt taylor
Casco
LD 2121**

The staffing shortages that we face have made it necessary for us to work a minimum of eight hours overtime per week for years. The fact is that many of us work 60 plus hours a week. This causes us to miss family gatherings, kid's events and have to reschedule crucial appointments with little to no notice. We are part of the public safety family and I can attest there are many times where I do not feel safe driving a vehicle after working my fourth 16-hour shift in a row because we can't find people to fill our seats. There are people who sleep on their off hours at the station because of this. All of this does not even include the mental toll of having to be hypervigilant for so long and not knowing if the next call that you take is going to send you on a downward spiral that honestly I worry that many of my coworkers much less myself may not recover from. At minimum, any part of this bill if passed that makes it way to benefit the telecommunicators of this state only helps to try and break the cycle of the chronic issue of short staffing that nearly every PSAP in this state faces.

Testimony in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government,

My name is Rita Pello. I am writing to you today on behalf of myself as a private citizen in Augusta. I appreciate your committees for taking the time to consider this testimony in support of LD 2121. I work as a Title 1 Coordinator for the Maine Department of Education so my testimony will focus on the department of education but can be related to other state agencies.

Before becoming a Title I coordinator for the state in early 2022, I worked at a remote job at an education non-profit. When leaving that job, I weighed whether to take a pay cut because I was excited at the opportunity to have a greater positive impact and reach within the state that I recently moved to and now proudly reside. I had the privilege of being able to take a pay cut in order to do this work. However for many folks and for good reasons, that is not a choice they can make. I am in support of this bill so that it could attract more qualified workers, and bring in new people to the state who are currently not attracted to state-level work because of these trade offs.

The unfortunate truth, especially in a sector like education, is that there are many highly qualified people who would rather be paid fairly in a remote non profit job than working for the state. I want to see that change. I want to see these qualified, dedicated, creative, and passionate people working at the state because it's at the state level that we provide widespread professional development, grant funding and innovation opportunities, attention and resources to underserved students, partnerships with communities, and guidance on law, fiscal compliance, and instructional best practices.

This study is especially important now because nearly half of the Maine DOE will retire within the next ten years. I dont think we can wait to update our compensation and classification system a moment longer, lest we lose the opportunity to have a strong workforce that propels us into the future.

When determining whether to support this bill, please consider the immense impact a strong, resourced, and highly qualified staff would have on the state of Maine. And for the DOE, in particular, this means a trickle down to better support and guidance to the districts, schools, educators, families, and students in this state. I urge legislators to support this bill in order to help the state of Maine and its citizens thrive.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. The state of Maine matters to me greatly.

Roger Dube
Frenchville
LD 2121

I've been a state employee for 34 years and every contract that we have been receiving seems to be like we are falling behind compared to our neighboring employees in the same work force. Benefits have eroded and the staffing had decreased as well. Also the states ability to refill positions in the M&O area have decreased do to higher paying jobs nearby and the long wait to get interviews and actually be accepted and start working. The governor was more interested for the UPS getting a fair contract while the people that work for her providing the needs to keep roads open and public safe are not getting a fair contract and she doesn't wanna step up for her own working people and the needs of the public. we have seen a decrease in work performance due to lack of staffing in the actually field of work. Roads, ditches, cleaning of guard rails along with other things are not getting cleaned and accomplished because we are so short handed and have a lot on our workplan with little help. we need to get higher pay in order to get more applicants and the process of hiring someone needs to be processed faster so the applicants don't back out do to the long wait.

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government. I'm writing in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions. My name is Tim Hebert and I am testifying on my own time as a private citizen.

I work as a Senior Technician for MaineDOT as a resident with contractors that place bids on the work through Project Development. I submitted testimony on LD 258 for the biennial budget last year about the pay gap please feel free to go back and read it to learn more about my story and experience.

Last spring during our Bridge annual meeting, a slide show from power point showed the staffing of Bureau of Project Development and the reliance of 68% consultant use. It also shows the age distribution of project development staff, with 53% of staff over age 50 and 33.7% of staff over the age of 55. We are going to see a lot of these folks retiring soon, if they stick with the State long enough to that point and we will be losing a lot of institutional knowledge. I am concerned we can effectively recruit qualified staff to replace these workers with the Maine's current wage structure for state employees.

Another sheet mentions technician series reclassifications, which the person talking about the power point stated was started by Bureau of Project Development (BPD) management before the Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) put out that the class and comp would be done and that was documented at July of 2020. The person talking stated that BHR was taking too long and BDP decided to go at it themselves again. Also, the Bangor Daily News story last year that showed consultant pay went up due to costs associated with business and keeping qualified personnel. Maine needs to fix the classification system sooner than later, otherwise operations and staffing levels will get worse than they are today.

I am Senior Technician pay range 26 with topped out pay at \$35.46 per hour without longevity which hasn't changed in pay range since the 1970's. Transportation Engineer II, pay range 31 has a top pay of \$42.42 per hour. The Transportation Engineer has already gotten its compensation and classification change as of 2019. I recently applied to work with the consultants, which are used for 68% and They offered me starting between \$44-48 depending on whether the state would take me back ASAP which I was being told by my direct supervisor I would be. The pay gap needs the proper funding to attract and retain employees for the entire work/life balance.

As I said during my testimony for the LD 258 Biennial Budget hearing, I want state that the only reason I have not left state government is I want to fight in this position for my fellow employees for what is right, equitable and fair. We deserve to be compensated fairly and competitively for the hard work that we do for the State of Maine. Please fight for us on this and support LD2121.

Tim Hebert
Bangor

Tristan Price
Portland
LD 2121

I work for the Maine DEP's Hazardous Waste Management Unit. We have one open position we're trying to fill in the unit. I started with the Department in the summer of 2022 and the position has been open since before that time. When I was hired we had one person in the process of leaving for a better paying industry job as well. We're currently in our third round of interviews in for this position as we had offered the position in each of the first two rounds to our top candidates, who declined the offer citing low pay as the issue. Because of the difficulty in hiring our unit has only had one representative in Portland (myself) who is primarily responsible for HW activity in all of Southern Maine. This lack of staff has meant we have a multi-year backlog of licenses to get to and we have not been able to meet annual EPA targets for compliance inspections in Maine. Because of low pay we're unable to perform our job as needed for the people of Maine.

Personally, I do not know if I can continue to work this job for my whole career. The cost of living in Portland is very high and the <50k starting wage for my position, which requires multiple years of experience or graduate education (I have a master's degree) is not enough. I love the work we do and it's very important we keep doing it. But positions outside of state government and/or in other states would pay me more and that's something I have to consider. I, like most of my coworkers, love the work we do and the people we work with. It is truly a shame how little material appreciation we get from the state when it comes to paying a wage that reflects our importance. I urge you to pass this bill as it will help show the state how large the pay gap is. Rises in pay would allow our state employees to live dignified lives and give us the ability to fill our open positions with smart and capable people who as of now, cannot live on this pay.

Testimony of Jonathan French, P.E. in Support of LD 2121 An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Jonathan French, I live in Hallowell and I am a licensed professional engineer in Maine with over 25 years in state government. I have spent almost 23 of those years at the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), where I currently serve as the Engineering Data Manager for the Bureau of Project Development, and I've been in that position for over three years. I regret that I am unable to testify before you at the public hearing, but I am in strong support of LD 2121 because it's become increasingly clear to me that I may be one of the last state employees with my years of experience or less that is still planning on spending their entire career in state government. If we don't do something to change that, we won't have a state workforce that can adequately perform the necessary work for the people of Maine.

As the Engineering Data Manager, I have the responsibility for administering the CADD software for the Department, including the training of employees. Currently we are in the middle of a migration to a new drafting and design software. This software will likely need to have MaineDOT changing versions every 18 months due to the vendor requirements. It took about five years for Department staff to gain core competency in the legacy design software when it was introduced in 2005. I wonder if staff will even remain with MaineDOT long enough to gain similar competency in the new software before they leave, because with just the basic knowledge of the software they are extremely desirable for other employers who are looking for Department work. Will I have to have continuous training of just the fundamental skills due to turnover of employees? If so, what will that do to budgets, as well as production?

When I left my position as a transportation engineer for the Bureau's Highway Program in September of 2020 to serve in the position I have now, I was the senior most designer in a production role and had over 19 years of experience in designing projects. Now, the most senior designer in production has less than ten years of experience, and I am curious how long they will actually stay with the Department. Most of the designers on the two remaining internal teams in the Program have less than five years of experience. The Bridge Program in the Bureau has also turned over personnel with several new entry level engineers being hired in the last few years. Retirements and promotions to supervisory and management positions have occurred, but there have been many employees leaving for other employers as well.

Some employees have left for municipal or federal positions, while the majority have left for the private sector. This means that taxpayer dollars have been used, and are now still potentially being used to train employees for private sector companies. However, in that situation, in order to continue to be able to produce work, the Department not only has to attempt to hire a new employee and invest in more training for them to fill the vacancy, but also has to hire the company that recruited the former state worker to do the work. In some cases the company will also have that employee do the same exact project work that they were doing before, only now under a contract and for a significant profit for that company at taxpayer expense. I've been reminded of this recently, as I've seen these former employees in multiple meetings I've had with consultants to explain how to set up the new design software so they can do contracted work for the Department.

It's now time to ask the question: what do we want the state government workforce to look like in the decade ahead? Do we want our state government to continue to be a training ground for the private sector, and use taxpayer dollars to develop employees for companies who will use them to profit from state contracts at taxpayer expense? Do we want to erode the state workforce to the point where we are totally reliant on the private sector to deliver state services at whatever profit margin they desire? I would hope the answers to these questions would be "no."

The alternative is at least attempting to try to retain a core workforce with the competency and skills that are needed to provide quality public services and protect that investment that taxpayers have made in the training of the current state workforce. LD 2121 will give the State the ability to make that attempt with funding a new compensation and classification system for Executive Branch workers, as well as create changes to statute for recruitment and retention adjustments. It would also require the State to work with bargaining agents to create recruiting programs that address chronic understaffing in certain agencies, and provide continuous legislative oversight of the vacancies that exist in each department.

In 2011, in testimony I warned the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee at the time that the state budgets proposed to erode state employee benefits would "devalue Maine's public sector work and employees by continuing to 'tax' state employee benefits and salaries while increasing expectations and demands" and I stated that if that happened "I doubt many will even want to consider becoming a state employee."

The budgets passed with that erosion, especially to health insurance and retirement benefits, and salaries stagnated due to minimal wage increases. Employees left and those who remained were forced to pick up the slack in a successful bid by the LePage

administration to shrink the state workforce and make public sector work unattractive. Now, in spite of fair contracts during the Mills administration, with larger wage increases than were seen with the prior administration, Maine state government is still struggling to fill positions. It simply can't compete with other employers because of the decline in desirability of public sector work, and the lower wages and eroded benefits. Job security was always a selling point with state employment with benefits for seniority. However, with younger workers willing to be quite mobile in their career path to take advantage of companies competing for workers, especially in engineering, those benefits of security and seniority are no longer as important as wages and income.

It has reached the point that now Department management is just looking for candidates to apply for a position and they will decide what role to put them in if the one they apply for does not work out. They just want to "get the person in the door." I remember when I first applied for a seasonal highway laborer position to "get my foot in the door" as a college student and now it's being left wide open and nobody wants to walk through. That is where we are now, so something has to change.

The State of Maine has to have competitive wages to recruit qualified workers and it has to maintain that competitiveness in order to retain them. Therefore, I strongly urge the members of the Committee to vote "ought to pass" for LD 2121. Please give the State of Maine the means it needs to recruit and retain a state government workforce that can consistently provide quality services, as well as the legislative oversight necessary to protect that investment in the state workforce by Maine taxpayers. Thank you.

February 5, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government. I'm writing in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

My name is Kevin Hopkins, I am a full-time employee with the Maine State Ferry Service and reside on Vinalhaven, an island served by the Ferry Service. The vessels we operate cost \$10-15 million (depending on which size vessel is in service). Among many things, we carry one of the most precious cargos there is, people. People rely on us for their safety and the safety of their loved ones.

Due to recruitment issues, most employees start at the highest salary level for their position, step 8 and Captains now start at step 4 because the State cannot hire workers at the starting salary rates. Due to staffing shortages, my union and MaineDOT had to negotiate a recruitment and retention stipend for various classifications within Maine State Ferry Service. Captains are the only position which got a mere 3%, while others get 30%. MSFS Captains are severely underpaid compared to the Ferry Captain jobs in the region and country. Some of these jobs having starting pay rates that exceed our maximum wage, this is not sustainable and had led to an interruption of our services.

In the past two years, these preventable staffing shortages have caused ferries to be canceled and terminals closed. This has left passengers missing medical appointments, cancer treatments, school sports. During these times, freight hasn't gotten to the island communities which interferes with the islanders and our economy that depend on an uninterrupted ferry service. Crews have had to work extra shifts to allow other coworkers to get to appointments and take vacation. We are essential employees. The ferries cannot operate if a crew member is absent for any reason.

This past summer I alone worked as Captain for 21 days straight after having my vacation request denied, due to no reliefs, 11.5-hour days with no breaks. One pay period I had 82.5 hrs of overtime on top of my normal 80 hrs – Ferry Captains do not get premium overtime pay.

Positions have been posted, yet they don't get filled. Most recently management has swapped vessels between Vinalhaven and Islesboro due to crew shortages. Islesboro had canceled trips due to crew shortage, so the vessel that can (doesn't mean it should for safety reasons) operate with one less crew member was sent to Islesboro from Vinalhaven. The vessel requiring 5 crew was put in service on Vinalhaven. In the past week one trip was delayed and one whole day canceled for that vessel due to crew shortages with the possibility of more cancellations this week.

Our crews rescue lives, as they did this summer off Islesboro. The islanders and the island tourist industries depend on us. LD 2121 will help the Maine State Ferry Service run smoother, more consistently, and allow us spend our earned time with our families free from guilt. I ask

that this committee and the Maine Legislature support LD2121 so the State of Maine can more reliably service these island communities.

Respectfully,

Captain Kevin Hopkins
Vinalhaven, Maine

Dear State and Local Government Committee,

I am writing to you to testify in favor of LD 2121, “An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions”, and underscore how the straightforward action of adjusting Executive Branch position salaries would have the largest effect on improving Maine state government function and employee recruitment and retention. The negative impacts which stem from nearly 1 in 6 positions remaining vacant across State Government are not unique to any one Department or Program, but have affected my duties and the outlook of my Division as a Marine Resource Scientist II in the Department of Marine Resources (DMR).

Life as a Maine State Employee working in West Boothbay Harbor in 2024, requires most employees to live out of the local community and ‘off peninsula’, including myself, driving 45 minutes one way to the office from a slightly more affordable Bath housing market. The mismatch between State compensation and the housing costs has impacted recruitment and retention, with staff resources spent on searches that result in zero or limited applicants, restricting the ability to attract applicants that would maximize program performance. Single program staffing deficiencies have secondary impacts because State Government is so interconnected. The Administrative Staff positions in the West Boothbay Office are only recently fully staffed as of fall 2023 for the first time in at least 3 years. The most senior of these positions has cycled through 3 hires in that time, with one leaving to return to New York City, citing a better ability to afford housing close to their workplace, unbelievably. In the interim, administrative tasks were shouldered by science staff in addition to their own responsibilities, stressing the human resources meant to serve the Maine people through their respective programs. The State investment in onboarding positions with high turnover is also substantial, impacting the ability of the State to function as intended. An understaffed financial office also impacts the ability to purchase required equipment, process contracts and invoices, and meet external reporting deadlines within our department. These examples underscore the pervasiveness of the understaffing issue and how, even if one program is fully staffed, its ability to serve the Maine people to its best ability can still be hamstrung.

The need to support LD 2121 came into sharp focus for me recently in my capacity at the Department of Marine Resources (DMR), I helped to author two successful proposals totaling \$5 million dollars in award from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. One of these proposals partners with 6 mostly nonprofit organizations along the Maine coast to conduct the work, ranging from York to Washington counties. Five of these partners submitted budgets which fund a full time position through this money, 4 of which are new positions. The scopes of work for these positions are all narrower than my own, yet every single one of them is advertising at least a higher wage, and most a more competitive overall compensation package. These future job postings are going to be in direct competition with 3 DMR positions to be created through other awards to do the same work. The most qualified job seekers in this marine science market will choose to work for those nonprofit entities instead of DMR, which is more directly competitive with graduate or post-Doctoral stipends without the coinciding academic career advancement.

Employment with the State should not be a last resort for qualified job seekers in Maine. Maine State employees should not have to live on the financial edge of affording housing where they work. Maine State employees should not have to continually perform duties beyond their position due to chronic and persistent vacancies. The people of Maine should not be continually

underserved by their State Government. Supporting LD 2121 is an opportunity to straightforwardly take meaningful steps to support existing employees, reduce the resources spent on staff turnover, increase the prestige of working for the State of Maine, and enhance the ability of the State to serve its people – all with a great return on this investment.

Thank you to the State and Local Government Committee for the ongoing work to address this matter.

Sincerely,

Kevin Staples

**Testimony of Mark Brunton
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989**

**In Support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions,
Sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government,
1:30pm Thursday, February 8, 2024, Cross Office Building Room 214 and Electronically**

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover and members of the Committee on State and Local Government, I'm Mark Brunton, president of the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. We are a labor union representing over 13,000 Maine workers, including workers in all three branches of Maine State Government.

In 2023, I wrote to the Legislature to urge passage of LD 1854, An Act to Complete and Implement the Comprehensive Review of the Classification and Compensation System for Executive Branch Employees. The bill went under the hammer and was included in the budget legislation passed last July. The enacted budget required the Mills administration to complete the comprehensive review by January 31, 2024, and begin negotiation with workers on the implementation of the recommended changes to the state classification and compensation system.

The classification and compensation system for state employees was put in place in the late 1970's. When the system was created, the Legislature also included in state law a requirement for the Bureau of Human Resources to provide active reviews, management and oversight of the entire compensation and classification system every 10 years. Each subsequent administration has failed to do this basic maintenance, and both state workers and Mainers who count on state services are paying the price for their intransigence.

The efforts of MSEA members and workers to correct the Bureau of Human Resources' dereliction of duty began in 2019. In our negotiations with Governor Mills' administration, MSEA and Executive Branch workers agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding to complete a compensation and classification study to support a discussion, grounded in empirical evidence, to determine whether the pay gap still existed, to measure the extent of the gap and to outline the deficiencies in the classifications across all departments. The State contracted with Segal Consulting to conduct the study. The compensation study was designed by a joint labor-management committee and utilized a sampling of "benchmark" positions to determine the average compensation of state government positions.

The compensation portion of the study was completed in 2020. It showed state workers were underpaid 15% on average compared to their public and private sector counterparts throughout Maine and New England. At the time, the administration attempted to block MSEA from releasing the results of the compensation study to our members.

In contract negotiations in 2021, MSEA demanded immediate action to end the pay gap. The administration and DAFS insisted they needed more time to finish the classification portion of the study. MSEA agreed to extend the MOU and assumed there would be good faith to complete the study, then negotiate its implementation. After a six-month delay in the start of contract negotiations in 2023, we discovered that little progress was made on the classification portion of the study, and thus we relied

upon Representative Gattine and the Legislature to enact a deadline for the administration to meet its obligations to state workers.

On February 1, 2024, I received a copy of the Report and Recommendations of the Maine State Government Classification and Compensation Plans Study presented to the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and State and Local Government on behalf of Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS) Commissioner Figueroa. To say I was disappointed would be a gross understatement. The report is not only incomplete, it is wholly inadequate in terms of meeting the State's obligations under our negotiated contracts and state law. The report declares "it's time to set aside the phrase 'pay gap'" without providing any evidence of progress in terms of competitiveness of state employment with local governments, the federal government, or the private sector. In fact, according to the DAFS' own data, the report shows that Maine State Government per-job wages grew 19% from 2019 to 2022, whereas the total growth in all sectors in Maine was 23.3%. As such, their data contradicts the report's purported findings. Other publicly available data shows that average wage growth in Maine has been 30% from 2019 through the first quarter of 2023, according to a quarterly census report on wages – meaning that the pay gap continues to grow.

I have recounted the events of the past five years to emphasize each opportunity Governor Mills and DAFS missed to fix the employment system in Maine State Government and avert the current crises in several departments which directly result from severe staffing shortages. MSEA members and staff have worked tirelessly to convince the administration and DAFS to address the pay gap. It is clear to me that the Mills administration is not interested in addressing critical staffing shortages and raising state employment up to regional and national pay standards. It is also clear that the Legislature must appropriate the funds to close the pay gap and direct the administration to complete their work to fix the compensation and classification system. We are fully prepared to work with the administration between now and July 1st to negotiate the terms of implementation and assist DAFS in this effort.

Thank you and I would be glad to answer any questions.

Dear senators, members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Paul Carignan and I work for the Maine Department of Corrections as a Special Educator at Long Creek Youth Development Center. I am speaking in support of LD 2121. I have worked at the facility for almost 6 years. I started as a Juvenile Program Worker in 2018.

During the time I have been at the facility there have been multiple changes due to the state's effort to create alternatives to the facility, and decrease the numbers of incarcerated youth. During the pandemic we saw the numbers decrease to below 25 at one point. Unfortunately, the offending youth did not get the memo that the facility was looking to decrease it's numbers, and find alternatives to the cold cement facility of LCYDC. In fact, when our staffing numbers came to a crisis level, Juvenile Community Correction Officers helped staff the building to maintain safety. In doing this they were able to witness 1st hand the challenges that existed in programing and overall staff and client safety within the facility. I overheard it being said that many of these JCCO's were trying to avoid sending kids to LCYDC as they understood 1st hand the impact of low staffing levels.

With a staff member working shifts that require them to be forced to work overtime multiple times a week. This has a direct impact on the facility. When I was coming on line as a JPW one of the most important learning was done working with a veteran staff member and modeling the way that they managed a unit and built and sustained relationships with residents. Times have changed. What was seen as valuable learning moments,, can now be seen as increasing the danger of working in the units. The people that you rely on to model as Unit staff are overworked and under extreme pressure as the intensity and complexity of individuals being housed at LCYDC has made the task far more complicated and requiring more staff presence. The results show staff turnover being unusually high and people have told me that it not worth the money to work in an environment where they are constantly at risk. There are careers requiring far less training and comparable pay outside of working for the state working in the private sector. Employment at LCYDC has become a revolving door, and many skilled, quality employees are leaving for employment where they can be respected through salary and appreciated for the skills they bring to an occupation. This is clearly not only impacts the safety, but the money that is used to train individuals for six weeks before they are ready to work in the unit is often wasted as people come to the realization that the supports and the compensation for their efforts are not in place resulting in six weeks of training wasted as the employees are not retained.

The end result of staff not being safe in the facility results in residents being unsafe, not receiving the necessary programming for proper rehabilitation and skill building. This leads to recidivism, and the Department of Corrections, specifically Long Creek Youth Development center not performing its mission.

"To promote public safety by ensuring that juvenile offenders are provided with education, treatment and other services that teach skills and competencies; strengthen pro-social behaviors and require accountability to victims and communities."

This is not the case at this moment due in part by the state not offering the necessary compensation to maintain a consistent qualified staff providing safety in communities within the state of Maine. By closing the pay gap we will begin to resolve many of the issues specific to the Maine Department of Corrections as well as the State's dedicated service employees integral to keeping this state performing at an optimal level.

Thank you for your time,

Paul Carignan
Special Education Teacher
Juvenile Program Worker
M.S.E.A Local 1989 Steward

February 6, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, I'm Ramona Welton of Augusta. I'm writing as a private citizen in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions. As a process auditor in my 40th year of service with the Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles, I know when things add up and when they don't.

Yet again, strong increases in state government revenues are predicted for the coming years on top of the recently projected \$265 million surplus for the next two fiscal years. This follows a trend of several years of recent surpluses. While this is good news, there is a caveat: These surpluses are a direct result of the state government underpaying thousands of state workers throughout our careers. Not one but two state-commissioned reports found the state consistently lowballs pay for state workers compared with other public- and private-sector workers throughout Maine and New England.

A 2009 report documented that Maine Department of Transportation crews were underpaid by 21.6 percent; professionals like engineers and chemists, 17 percent; institutional workers, 11.8 percent; and supervisory workers, 9.6 percent. The Baldacci administration essentially responded by stamping the report "confidential" and instituting 20 unpaid state worker furlough days, further reducing state workers' wages.

Under the LePage administration, state workers went four years without raises and the pensions of state workers and teachers were cut to pay for tax breaks that mostly benefited Maine's wealthiest residents. LePage left hundreds of positions vacant, worsening a crisis in delivering services from plowing snow to answering 911 calls to staffing our psychiatric centers. Data from 2020 show we're paid 15 percent less than our peers in the private and public sector in Maine and across New England. For some classifications, it's worse: Accountants are underpaid by 20 percent to 33 percent; chemists, 24 percent; civil engineers, 20 percent to 25 percent; mechanics, 31 percent; and correctional officers, 16 percent. Since then, wage growth for state workers has lagged far behind that of the average Maine worker. In 2022, Mainers saw average raises worth 8.6 percent, while state workers' pay increased only 4 percent. With most employers competing in a tightening labor market, the average worker saw double the nominal raises state workers did, and the pay gap continued to grow.

State job postings tell the story: Custodians, laborers, groundskeepers, park rangers and assistant rangers starting barely over \$15 an hour. There is a revolving door for state government positions, and the State of Maine ought to do more to effectively recruit and retain these workers who keep our state running.

State commissioners, environmental groups, state workers and their unions all say the state must address this wage problem. The impact on services is real. One in 6 positions in state government is still vacant — totaling nearly 2,100 vacancies. The reward for those who keep working for the state: forced overtime.

When you're plowing roads, answering 911 calls or working with children and families in crisis, the mental and physical exhaustion of excessive overtime runs the risk of becoming a serious public safety concern. And when the Maine Department of Environmental Protection or Maine State Ferry Service are understaffed, as they've been for years now, it affects our economy.

In the most recent round of in contract negotiations, the Bureau of Human Resources refused to meet with us for months. Given how far behind the state has fallen, it's no mystery why the state HR director didn't want to meet with all state workers. It'd be difficult to defend this stark inequity in front of an audience of your own employees.

It is difficult to tell people who work with you for days, weeks and years that the 6% raise we recently received will make their lives better when they have to work 2 jobs to keep their home, heat their home and feed their family. Or put another way, I paid \$3.99 this week for the same loaf of bread that in 2021 was \$2.00. Our wages aren't keeping up and haven't for years. Working for the State should not be a commitment to poverty. The very people who act as the safety net for the peoples of Maine should not be rewarded with poverty wages and then told how great they are.

As one of Maine's largest employers, the state of Maine has a duty to create fair standards for workers across Maine. Instead, the state is actually applying downward pressure on wages as it competes with industries for the same pool of workers.

Some have suggested using the supposed surplus for tax cuts for the wealthiest Mainers. This is offensive; the last round of income tax cuts in 2011 were paid for by dramatically cutting the retirement benefits of state workers and teachers, who don't even receive Social Security benefits.

To be clear, while neither Gov. Janet Mills nor the 131st Legislature created these issues, they have a responsibility to fix them. Please support LD 2121. Thank you.

Ramona Welton

Augusta, Maine

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government. I'm here in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

My name is Ronnette Partridge, I have worked for the state of Maine for almost 17 years. I am a person not just part of the numbers on your budget pages. I have been married for 33 years and I have 6 children.

I work for the Department of Health and Human Services Disability Determination Services. I am testifying on my own time as a private citizen.

I started working for the state of Maine in May 2006 I started as a Disability examiner in the Pro Tech Salary Scale grade 20. When I started the minimum wage was \$6.75 my starting wage was \$13.75, \$7.00 above minimum wage. Today the minimum wage is \$13.80 and the pay grade I started at is \$18.94, only \$5.14 above minimum wage. Some McDonalds locations are hiring unskilled crew members at \$18.00 per hour.

Some years ago, the state did a wage analysis clearly showing state employees are underpaid, in the intervening time state wages have not gone up all that much. They certainly have not kept up with the cost of living nor have the upper pay scales been adjusted to keep in line with the increases in the minimum wage.

Our office, DDS, is contracted with the federal government adjudicating Social Security Disability Claims for Maine residents. We currently have 35 case deciders. The work is highly skilled and takes years to learn the process and policies are constantly changing, and it requires a dynamic workforce to adjudicate accurate and timely disability decisions for the people of Maine.

When I started here, all case deciders had to start as Disability Examiners and after a year they could apply to promote to a Disability Adjudicator. Due to staff retention challenges our Director has worked with DHHS and HR and eliminated the Disability Examiner line from our office and promoted all case deciders regardless of skill level from Examiners to Adjudicators. They have further taken to starting new employees at step 4 of the pay scale instead of step 1. This has left our long-term employees demoralized and somewhat upset. We have one employee that has been here 7 years and she is now making the same amount as

new hires. This is discouraging as experienced and highly skilled staff are paid close to that of unexperienced and unskilled staff.

We here at Disability Determination services have a serious hiring and retention problem. Of our 35 case deciders, we only have 6 that have been here more than 7 years, and the rest have 3 years or less. Since 11/2020, we have lost 35 Examiners and Adjudicators, most of who were new employees that did not stay long. A significant number of employees we have lost have gone to the Veterans Administration including our Director of Operations.

The sad part of all of this is that being 100% federally funded, the federal government has offered more money for wages to improve retention, but the state has said no because we cannot make more than other employees in the DHHS pay scales. Disability adjudication for social security is very different from other state programs and Maine Disability Determination Adjudicators should be compensated fairly and appropriately.

The sad part is that Maine is going to lose workers to other states that pay more and have better climates. 43.9% of Maine's population is 50 and older, 20.6% are 19 or younger. 35.4% are between 20-49. Many companies are scrambling for workers and many of Maine's restaurants already close early due to lack of staff.

Maine needs to take immediate action with increased and competitive pay to attract and retain a talented workforce to best serve our citizens.

Please support the passage of LD2121.

Ronnette Partridge
Litchfield

Support LD 2121
Sarah Gardner
February 7, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Sarah Gardner from Lisbon Falls, and I'm here on my own time as a member of my union, MSEA, and as a private citizen in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

I have been with the State as a sales tax auditor since August 2023. I like my job and want to stay long term. However, low pay throughout the State is causing serious issues which need resolution now. I am asking you as fellow Mainers and public servants to help us achieve those goals by voting in favor of LD 2121. I have a few relevant points to bring to your attention.

Myself and those hired with me were brought in at Step 8, which until recently, was the highest step on the pay scale. The fact that the State must hire people in at this level is a major red flag. It is evidence that people will no longer work for lower salaries because they cannot afford to, and because they can find better pay in the private sector. No one should be making less than \$20/hr. I have family members and friends in the State who earn less than that. It's degrading.

On January 30th, the Governor approved recruitment and retention payments for some workers in DHHS. Of course, those workers deserve it, but these payments are inefficient and categorically misleading. My colleagues and fellow union members fought for across the board wage increases in 2023, but we were given a last, best, final offer that included a one-time, lump-sum of \$800 in lieu of retro pay, which after taxes was closer to \$570. This came this February, 8 months after the expiration of our last contract, and due to high bonus tax rates, we were taxed at a higher-than-normal rate. We are happy to have some increases, but this does not come close enough fix the root of the State's ongoing recruitment and retention issues we need to see fixed." Lump-sum bonus payments and "stipends" tacked on to pay rates are short term solutions, when what we need is hourly raises across the board, especially for those on the lower end of the pay scale. The State knows and admits there is a problem, as proven by Mills' efforts to recruit and retain staff. At the same time, State officials are now denying the existence of a pay gap. This cognitive dissonance needs to be addressed. We know Maine has had hundreds of millions of dollars in surpluses now and in recent years, yet there is a refusal to channel these funds to swiftly resolve these ongoing staffing shortages.

The State Tax Assessor held a meeting with staff on January 8th in which he admitted the State is facing a recruitment and retention problem. During the meeting, he informed sales tax staff that due to high staffing shortages, there is a likelihood we will be redirected to answer income tax phones for the income tax filing season. Changes like these are too common and create a loop of inefficiency. People in both the income and sales divisions must set aside time to teach and learn a whole new subject. Training that is intended to take 4 weeks is compressed into a few hours. It creates liability and a general "bad look" for the State when they have untrained people answering taxpayers' financial questions. It is inefficient because when untrained people take calls, anything beyond a simple "where's my refund?" question will have to be placed on a callback sheet for the income division to revisit. This wastes taxpayer time, and the time of employees in both divisions. We are already short staffed, and executive

decisions like these only serve to worsen the problem that can only be solved with higher pay. It is clear to many employees that this is a decision made by leaders who are out of touch with reality.

There is a simple solution to the recruitment and retention problem, and it is to pay people more. Please vote in favor of LD 2121 and support your colleagues so we can provide better services for the people of Maine.

Thank you for your time.

Sarah Gardner

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Winifred Malia and I live in Scarborough. I am a Principal Economic Research Analyst, I have worked for the Maine Dept of Labor almost 37 years, and I am the current Chapter President of the Elchel-Crinion Chapter of the Maine Service Employee Association. I am submitting this testimony on my own time, using my own personal devices in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

As you know, the Dept of Labor provides vital services for the State of Maine such as employment and training services for workers and employers, workplace safety training, wage and hour standards, services for the blind & visually impaired, deaf, hard of hearing & late deafened, vocational rehabilitation, labor market information, and economic stability from unemployment benefits while workers find reemployment. In order to provide these services, the Dept of Labor needs to be able to fully staff the positions. Retention and recruitment of qualified employees is made more difficult as the pay gap widens without any meaningful progress to close it.

The pay gap is causing positions to remain vacant or employees to accept positions elsewhere because the wages are on average 20% lower than similar public and private sector positions. There are regular job postings for rehabilitation counselor, career center consultants, occupational safety specialist, and customer service representatives to name a few because qualified individuals are not applying due to the low wages. There are numerous employees that have or will be retiring in the next few years. These positions need to be filled with qualified individuals and that will only happen if wages are competitive.

The Administration still does not admit that a pay gap exists - page 4 from the Report and Recommendations of the Maine State Government Classification and Compensation Plans Study. The pay increases from the collective bargaining contracts keeps wages close to wage increases that occurred across the entire State - private sector and government over the same time period. These contracts did nothing to address the pay gap presented in every study over the last 20 plus years. Page B-76 from State of Maine Market Study Report November 20, 2020 shows the pay gap for my position is 23-26% below the market rate. I provide analysis on the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund and legislative proposals. When will the Administration respect the services I provide and address this pay gap? The wage increases from collective bargaining are only cost of living adjustments but does not address the pay gap.

The Administration states that there have been over 3,000 reclassifications and reorganizations out of more than 5,500 which is a start but it is not finished. Questions to ask - when will the other 45% be complete? - were the reclassification and reorganizations band-aid fixes or did they bring wages inline with market rates?

Last year's budget increased the next Governor's salary from \$70,000 to \$125,000 (79%) and the next legislative salaries practically doubled. State workers are asking to be treated with respect by bringing wages inline with current market rates. As Representative David Woodsome said about raising the pay for members of the Legislature - "It is long overdue." I think resolving the pay gap is long overdue as well. Now is the time to use some of the surplus on the employees of the State of Maine.

The pay gap has been an issue for the last 20 years with no meaningful efforts to resolve it. Morale is affected when some employees are given stipends or reclassifications and reorganizations while 45 percent are still waiting. Recruitment and retention will continue to exist until the pay gap is addressed over all state government. I was on the MSEA Bargaining Team 2 years ago, the administration says that

the pay gap should not be a bargaining issue but a legislative issue. I feel the pay gap should be just as important an issue as raising the salary of the Governor and members of the Legislature.

I am asking that you support LD 2121 which helps to provide the funding to continue this work for the workers of the Dept of Labor and the rest of the Executive Branch that serve the citizens of the State of Maine every day by closing the pay gap. I want to thank the committee for listening and I will answer any questions you may have.

**Winifred Malia
Scarborough, ME**

TESTIMONY OF REBEKAH L KOROSKI
TO THE COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
FEBRUARY 8, 2024

Representative Stover, Senator Nangle and members of the Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Rebekah Koroski and I appreciate you taking the time to hear my position on LD 2121 – An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

I am currently a Management Analyst II with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. I have been a State Employee for almost 23.5 years. I apologize that I am unable to testify in person, as I am working on documenting expenses for roughly 100 oil spills reported as a result of the December 18, 2023 storm that caused flooding throughout the State for potential FEMA reimbursement. That is on top of my normal caseload.

When the price of gas drastically increased, State employees salaries were kept stagnant, making it more difficult to be able to afford to drive to work. In previous administrations, when the costs of everything was going up, the State employees were told that there was either no money to pay us, or that we needed to sacrifice for the good of the State as a whole. The State even expected the Retired Public Employees to sacrifice for the rest of the State when they reduced the cap on the COLA in 2011 to pay for tax cuts. In hindsight, I feel it showed that we were not valued as a whole – active or retired public employees.

Some of us, myself included, even went without merit increases because of budget constraints. I remember my supervisor writing a comment on a performance appraisal that I deserved a merit increase, but would not be getting one because merit increases were frozen in the budget.

During this time, the cost of our health insurance contributions also increased. We were getting squeezed on both sides. I am the child of a former State Employee. I remember what the health insurance was like back in the early 1990's. Having the health insurance that we had as a benefit paid for by the State with little to no co-pays was a decent trade-off at the time, especially if you had to see a lot of doctors or had small children. With how much and how fast the employee costs for the health plan have increased since 2000, it doesn't have the same appeal as a tradeoff for lower pay as it once did because the

employee could be paying over \$200.00 a paycheck for their spouse to be on the plan AND the family deductible has increased to \$1,100.00.

Here is a random thought that popped into my head and I wonder if this has anything to do with the State Employees being underpaid: There is also a public stigma attached to being a State Employee. I work hard and do my best to be a high performer. I remember interviewing for a job in a lab in the private sector. I had barely worked for the State for 6 months at the time. The owner of the company asked me why I would want to leave my cushy State job to come work for them. At that point, I was sure that I wasn't being seriously considered for the job all because I had a job with the State of Maine.

From my point of view, the State has been aware of the extent of the pay gap for quite a while. In April 2009, I was appointed as a representative of MSEA's Professional & Technical Bargaining Unit to work on the PRO TECH Pay Study Committee. In our monthly meetings, we reviewed job specifications, updated them based on input from member surveys, and scored those job specifications to determine where those jobs belonged on the scale. We were able to reach the point where we compared the pay of our classifications to those comparable in other states and in the private sector. I believe that it was late 2010 or early 2011 when we were making these comparisons. At that time, the median pay for a Management Analyst outside of Maine State Government was \$34.00 per hour. I was nearly topped out as a Management Analyst II and did not make even close to that amount. 13 years later, the top of the pay scale for a Management Analyst II is \$32.52. I am sure that the median pay for the Management Analyst ladder outside of State Government has increased as well. Once we reached that point and knew the disparity in pay for the classifications that held many people, the process ended. The State did not want to engage in the collaborative process any longer.

I found this interesting and thought I would share. I live in Cumberland County. The median income for those living in Cumberland County in 2023 was \$102,800. If you make 50% of that amount individually, or \$52,050, you are considered low income for the county. With the raise executive branch employees received on January 1, 2024, I am now making 66% of the median income for my county.

With the costs of everything going up, having that much of a disparity between your income & the median income can make it difficult when you need to purchase a vehicle. I cannot save enough to purchase a vehicle with cash, so I have to finance it. I have

better than decent credit, but not quite excellent. My interest rate for the loan for my car was 14.51%. That made it a little bit painful to go from no car payment to an almost \$400 per month car payment.

At my Department, we have nearly 50 positions vacant. That may not seem like many, but we are a small Department. We feel most of those vacancies in licensing positions. Management is having difficulties keeping and retaining staff because to hire from the outside, those staff start at step 1 on the scale. There is very little wiggle room on that. This perpetuates the continuation of our staff doing more with less resources.

Thank you again for taking the time to allow me to share my perspective on the pay gap. My understanding is that the State's compensation and classification study fell short of the mark. That is disappointing. Please hold the State accountable and help us close the pay gap. We are not asking for a lot. We are asking to be respected enough for the State to pay us properly for the essential services that we provide to the public.

February 8th, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Maine Legislature's Committee on State and Local Government,

I'm Brian Markey. I work for MaineDOT currently as an Assistant Technician and prior to that as a Transportation Worker III. I live in Kenduskeag. I'm writing on my own time in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine.

I've been with MaineDOT for eight years. I work seven days a week in order to pay my mortgage, health insurance, childcare and just day-to-day bills – heats, lights and stuff. I have a second job to make ends meet. I'd like to share with you my wages at each job and the work I do for each employer. At my second job, Bangor Aviation Food Service, the parent company that operates the restaurants at BIA, pays me \$30 an hour to service vending machines at the airport. But in my main job, with MaineDOT, I earn \$22.76 an hour operating a \$1.2 million testing vehicle for the department – and yes that hourly rate reflects in the recent 6% pay raise that Executive Branch workers received.

You need to know that the pay at MaineDOT is not enough to even really survive on. I just barely pay the bills. And it's not just the low pay that's a problem. It's also the huge workloads caused by understaffing. There are so many vacant positions we're all stretched way too thin. In my former job as a transportation worker, I once plowed continuously for 42-and-a-half hours straight, during the bomb cyclone of February 2017. You see double-vision, triple-vision, when you get that tired. This is all dangerous and hard work. It requires our full attention to keep everyone safe, not just the workers but the general public as well. In fact, MaineDOT is so short-staffed of plow drivers right now that they have asked me to plow this winter due to staffing shortages. It's not part of my job, but I've recently plowed for 25 hours in conjunction with my regular job.

Throughout Maine DOT, and the rest of state government, there's a big problem with recruiting and retaining qualified workers. It's been going on for decades. Some of you may recall that back in January of 2009, the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services contracted with Crescendo Consulting for a labor market survey. That survey found that even back in 2009, MaineDOT highway crews were paid 21.6 percent less than their private sector counterparts.

Whenever a MaineDOT camp is short Transportation Workers, it means everyone else has to work twice as hard. This leaves all of us vulnerable to health and safety problems. You can get rushed and that can lead to problems real fast.

In recent years, there has been some progress in dealing with the recruitment and retention problem at MaineDOT. A Recruitment and Retention Committee over the years took action to make things better in some job classifications. But there's much more work to be done and many more DOT classifications to address. We all know a Department-wide, State-wide solution is needed.

The State must start paying all of us fairly for the hard work we do. Management needs to stop lowballing the pay of state workers and start paying us fairly. You have the latest facts: As of 2020, State of Maine workers were being paid on average 15 percent less than what our

counterparts make throughout New England, and that's even after accounting for regional differences. It's all spelled out in the 2020 State of Maine Market Study Report. And it's even worse for some positions. Maintenance mechanics who work for the State of Maine are unperpaid by 31 percent, according to the report.. It should come as no surprise, then, that because MaineDOT competes with municipalities and the private sector for workers, the pattern of MaineDOT training drivers who then leave state service for better pay in the private sectors and municipalities is continuing.

The State Employee Pay Gap has worsened since that 2020 report came out. State wages haven't kept up with the rising cost of living, so my coworkers and I have been falling further and further behind. That's why I'm asking you to support LD 2121 to provide the funding necessary for the Executive Branch of Maine State Government to both complete and implement the State compensation and classification systems and close the state employee pay gap.

Funding and enacting LD 2121 is necessary to ensure the quality MaineDOT services folks count on, as well as the quality services Maine people count on from all other departments of Maine State Government. Please support LD 2121. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brian Markey
Kenduskeag, Maine

**The Wage Gap Still Exists: With an 18% Vacancy Rate, Maine Taxpayers Forced to Pay
Turnover Costs Exceeding \$432,000 Per Day in 2023**

Dr. Derryen M. Plante

Principal Revenue Agent at Maine Revenue Services

Nine Year State of Maine Employee

February 8th, 2024

Failing to Close the Pay Gap Cost Maine Taxpayers Over \$432,000 Per Day in 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Dr. Derryen Plante, I have been with the State of Maine for 9 years, and I am here on my own time to speak in support of LD 2121.

To understand the impact of this bill we must first establish an understanding of the issue. Our current classification system is over 40 years old. In a classification system that functions properly, employees are hired at Step 1 and promote to a higher step following a successful annual review. Promotion to a higher step in the pay scale results in a merit-based pay increase to that employee, which is a critical component of recruitment and retention.

Would you be surprised if I told you in my last 7 years with Maine Revenue Services, I have completed my Masters degree, completed my PhD, and successfully passed every performance evaluation, many with flying colors; yet I have never received a merit-based pay increase. This is one of the many consequences of our broken classification system. At Maine Revenue Services most of the individuals who are hired are brought in at the highest step of the pay scale, which means no matter how hard they work, they will never receive an increase in pay based on their effort or excellent performance.

The report recently issued by the Commissioner brings to light a couple key factors I want to touch on. You will undoubtedly notice the mention that this administration has increased pay by 24% in the last 5 years, and they insist it is time to set aside the phrase "pay gap" because progress is being made. I am here to tell you, that simply is not true. If you jump to page 15 of that same report, you will notice that inflation over the last 5 years is also 24%.

	Cumulative wage growth relative to January 2019	Inflation relative to January 2019
3% September 2019	3.0%	1.5%
4% January 2021	7.1%	3.9%
2% December 2021	9.3%	11.1%
4% July 2022	13.6%	16.6%
6% January 2024	20.5%	22.5%*
3% July 2024	24.1%	24.5%*
4% July 2024 – new step 9 for those eligible	29.0%	24.5%*
*inflation estimated to continue at average 2023 month-over-month rate		

"Incredibly, State of Maine wage increases have kept pace with the worst inflationary period in decades."

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You don't need a PhD to recognize that $24 - 24 = 0$. This means that no meaningful progress has been made at all to close the pay gap in the last 5 years, and this administration refuses to admit that. The report goes on to outline the number of different stipends and additional steps that the administration has approved in recent contracts. These efforts not only worsen an already broken classification system but give evidence as to how dysfunctional it currently is. As a member of the 2023 MSEA contract bargaining team, I can assure you that none of the new "benefits" listed by this administration in their report were given willingly.

The administration was able to drag their feet long enough at finalizing this classification and compensation study for them to use the excuse "well, the numbers are too out of date to be useful now." This is one of the most shameful and blatant abuses of power I have seen from this administration. Despite record setting tax revenues, this administration has continued to deem state employees unworthy of fair pay and a functioning classification system.

This denial has led to record setting turnover and vacancy rates throughout state government. As of February 1st, 2024, the statewide vacancy rate was just under 18%. A report has been attached outlining the vacancies by position throughout the state. These vacancies have a financial impact, one that is currently costing Maine taxpayers over \$423,000 a day in turnover costs. The taxpayers of Maine deserve better than to have \$423,000 of their money go into a shredder everyday with nothing to show for it. It is clear this administration will continue to avoid making long overdue changes to their classification system unless required to do so by law. Thank you for your time and consideration to this matter.

Quick Facts

1. The state of Maine lost 1,521 employees in 2023. The turnover cost associated with losing an employee is 1.5 – 2 times their annual salary, depending on their experience and position. ZipRecruiter estimates the average Maine salary to be \$58,007 as of January 2024. If we use this figure, and a turnover cost of 1.75 times the annual salary on average, we can calculate that turnover cost Maine taxpayers:
 - a. **\$154,400,132.25** annually in 2023
 - b. **\$423,014.06** per day in 2023

2. The statewide vacancy rate as of February 1, 2024, was 17.77%. There are currently **1,157 job classifications** in the State of Maine. The table below lists the number of job classifications that are currently understaffed by more than the average of 18%, at 25%, at 50%, and completely vacant.

Category	Number of Job Classes	Percentage of Total Job Classes
100% Vacancy Rate	69	6.0%
Over 50% Vacancy Rate	139	12.0%
Over 25% Vacancy Rate	257	22.2%
Over 18% Vacancy Rate	340	29.4%

3. A rough estimate shows that the **current wage gap sits at 16.7%**.

Year	COLA % Increase	Wage % Increase	Net Gain	Wage Gap
2019				15%
2020	1.6%	4.0%	2.4%	12.6%
2021	1.3%	2.0%	0.7%	11.9%
2022	5.9%	4.0%	-1.9%	13.8%
2023	8.7%	0.0%	-8.7%	22.5%
2024	3.2%	9.0%	5.8%	16.7%

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State and Local Government Committee. I here today to speak in support of LD2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

My name is Erin Feeney. I am the Culinary Arts Instructor at the Southern Maine Women's Re-Entry Center at the Maine Correctional Center in Windham. Working in corrections, for anyone who has never been impacted by the Justice system or worked in it, may bring some TV shows or movies to mind. To shed some light on what may come to mind, I would like to simply say that I am proud to do the work that I do in the state of Maine because of the high ethical standards that have been set forth in law and in practice by my colleagues which I hold in high esteem. The Maine Correctional System is not the nightmare that may come to mind, our staff work hard to keep the residents in our care safe and provide them with opportunities to change, heal and better themselves in the spirit of bettering Maine and Mainers as a whole. Inside and outside of those walls.

It's important to me that I make clear that I really love my job and I believe in what I do and that I am not here to complain, but I am here because I see the greater potential for the impact my work and the work of my colleagues has in store for Maine. My hope for the work we do is give residents at the facility the skills and confidence needed to recreate themselves, get a second chance and earn an honest living in an industry that plays an integral role in tourism and agriculture. Culinary is an inseparable aspect of both of those industries in fact. Both of which are hurting industries in staffing levels. My work helps train a workforce that could help generate more income for the state of Maine.

I love my job because I believe in what I do and how my work can benefit the state of Maine. For some background: I am grew up in Massachusetts and while visiting some childhood friends living in Portland, now Litchfield, I found it harder and harder to leave each time until I made the move back in 2016. One of the best decisions I have ever made. I bring this up to drive home the point that I am here in front of you today as a member of my Union, as someone who loves their job, and as someone who loves the state of Maine.

When it comes to speaking on staffing shortages in corrections, I think of the times where I have volunteered to cover for Correctional Officer cooks in my facility. I will be covering two vacation days next week. For me, that is not a harrowed story and I look forward to working in that kitchen with those ladies, but staffing shortages period are disconcerting when I look at states like Wisconsin. According to the New York Times, some Prisons in Wisconsin are at a staffing ratio of 10 staff to 900 inmates, and staffing shortages are something that was brought to the attention of elected officials in 2015. The situation in Wisconsin right now means no visitors for inmates, which when you think about it, that means their innocent families are paying for their crimes. It means constant lock downs, so no fresh air, no exercise. This is cruel and unusual and will not be helpful to anyone. If we as a state have ANY means to address staffing shortages BEFORE they become National news headlines, then do we not have an obligation to do so? Before it's too late?

Lastly, I want to bring up the impact of staffing shortages in terms of what I DON'T see. What I don't see is what happens when my valued colleagues go home. Working in Corrections takes an emotional toll, even when abundantly staffed. According to the Vera Institute Corrections Officers suffer a higher rate (in comparison to a national average of non-corrections staff) of depression at a rate of 25% compared to 7%, a higher rate of PTSD 27% to 4%, a higher rate of suicide 7% compared to 5% and a life expectancy of 59 years old compared to a national average of 75. If there is a means to keep these myself and my hard-working vulnerable colleagues who work in the dangerous, dismal but crucial component of a fully functioning democracy, then you have a moral obligation as an American and as a