

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, Senator Nangle, Rep. Crafts, and members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Jason Hall. I am here on my own time to speak about chronic staffing issues and the employee pay gap for Maine's Executive Branch workers in LD210.

I have been with the Ferry Service as an Able-Bodied Seaman since 2018 and in that time, I have observed firsthand the recruitment and retention challenges caused by the pay gap. While there have been efforts to address this issue, the last negotiated raise essentially just kept pace with inflation but did not ultimately address the pay gap that the state's own compensation study verified it exists. There have been temporary stop gap measures in the form of temporary stipends and bonuses and starting new hires at higher steps but once again these measures do not address the long-term issues.

The pay gap has had an adverse effect on recruitment and retention. It has long been known among professional mariners that the State cannot compete on the compensation front with the private sector maritime industry. However, with the increasing shortage of qualified mariners' in Maine and industry wide it has, and will continue to become increasingly difficult for the State to attract and keep mariners to fill these essential positions. All of the people I know personally who have left the MSFS have done so for higher paying maritime jobs. As a result of the current pay gap, the State is falling behind the curve and not keeping pace with employment trends.

The Ferry Service provides an essential life line to the island communities that allows them to exist, thrive and help drive Maine's economy. We are the life line for medical appointments, the island lobster and fishing industry, fuel, island businesses, and tourism for land-based Mainers and folks from across the globe.

A ferry vessel is required by the United States Coast Guard to have a full crew in order to operate. Shutting down a ferry due to staffing shortages disrupts the lives of the island communities and has a detrimental economic impact. With your support, we can do better and work to crystalize our reputation for reliability without leaning on expensive private contractors flying in from across the country.

I want to thank all members of the committees for your consideration. My sincere hope is that you will support more resources for Executive Branch personnel in LD210 than is currently outlined. This would help Maine state employees continue our efforts to serve the people of Maine.

Jason Hall