



Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and other members of the Labor Committee,

My name is John Bracciodieta. I am the Organizing and Data Specialist for the Maine Education Association (MEA).

The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, including teachers and other educators in public schools across the state, as well as numerous employees at both the University of Maine and Community College system.

I am here today to offer testimony on behalf of the MEA in SUPPORT of LD 599, *An Act to Codify the Federal Salary Threshold for Overtime Pay*.

Many of the dedicated public servants represented by the MEA are working in Maine's institutions of higher education and are non-teaching salaried professional that have been designated as exempt employees under both the state and federal *Executive, Administrative, or Professional exemption definition*. LD 599 is an important step in ensuring that these employees are fairly compensated for hard work they do on a daily basis.

Professional higher education employees are often called upon to work well beyond 40 hours a week on an ongoing basis. While it may have been the case in the past that long days were sometimes required to complete special project or meet seasonal demands (as examples), today, the employees of both the University System and the Community College systems are being asked to take on more and more work responsibilities. This 'job creep' is often the result of staff shortages or reductions and the distribution of essential work functions but it is also a function of new kinds of work being required for a host of possible reasons. These increased duties typically come without any increase in compensation and require more and more work hours. In short, professional higher education employees are being asked to work more without compensation taking away from life's other important elements, namely time with family and friends as well as time to participate in equally vital community and civic activities.

The salary thresholds for exempt status proposed by LD 599 while being a necessary step to provide appropriate compensation to professional employees for the work they do, also provide important benefits to the employers affected. Ensuring appropriate pay levels for work beyond 40 hours a week can only lead to increased morale and productivity among professional employees. It will also have the likely effect of helping to retain employees who feel workload pressure and can be an important element in attracting highly qualified employees to our public institutions.

Finally, you may hear testimony from those opposed to LD 599 that raising the salary threshold in any way is simply too costly. I would respectfully suggest in response to such 'cost' arguments that the establishment of the salary threshold does not de facto increase cost in the ways that may be implied. Employers have options. They can raise salaries to at least the threshold and realize a fixed cost in the short term, or they can simply pay employees for hours worked past 40 creating a much-reduced cost. The latter is the strategy that has largely been used by the University and Community College Systems in the past. The reality is that the bill will only increase personnel costs to the employer if in fact employees are required to work beyond 40 hours a week on a routine and consistent basis. This is a factor that the employer has control over and is the exact reason that such a bill is necessary and important for the hard-working

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citizens of Maine. Arguing against raising the salary threshold is essentially asking employees to subsidize the employer through their unpaid labor.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to address the committee on this important issue. I am happy to try and answer any questions you may have regarding my testimony.

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