



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

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation  
1pm Tuesday, April 29, 2025,  
State House Room 126 and Electronically**

**In support of LD 1268, An Act to Address Employee Recruitment and Retention Issues Within  
the Maine State Ferry Service by Providing a Yearly Stipend, Sponsored by Representative  
Michael Ray**

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, members of the Committee on Transportation, I'm Beth White, director of politics and legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. The Maine Service Employees Association represents over 13,000 workers across the state, including workers for the Maine State Ferry Service within MainesDOT.

We are here to support LD 1268 directing MainesDOT, beginning January 1, 2026, to provide an annual stipend to all employees of the Maine State Ferry Service calculated in an amount equal to \$5.00 per hour multiplied by the total hours worked the previous year for each employee and prohibiting the department from raising ferry tolls to pay for the stipend. To be sure, this stipend would be awarded on a yearly basis so that it wouldn't come from ticket money or raise costs on islanders.

We respectfully ask you to support LD 1268 because we believe it's necessary to help address the well-documented state employee pay gap – which is the difference between what Maine State Government workers earn compared to their public and private sector counterparts doing comparable work. Understaffing and vacancies throughout all departments of Maine State Government, including MainesDOT, remain a serious problem. According to data provided by the Executive Branch, as of November 2024, Maine DOT had 142 vacancies out of 634 positions for a vacancy rate of over 18%. This is actually an improvement compared to April 2024 when there were 166 vacancies for a vacancy rate of 22%.

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, which puts the state employee pay gap at 14%. Again, this is the State's own study. Please also see the related memo 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.

Our members at the Maine State Ferry Service have testified in front of the Legislature numerous times over the past few years about how low pay impacts their ability to recruit and retain quality workers; I've included links to a few of their testimonies below, but wanted to pull out a few quotes as well:

"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 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." - Captain Daniel McNichol

"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." - Captain Kevin Hopkins

"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." - Captain Aaron Sheridan

As you can hear from our members, the need for legislation such as LD 1268 is more urgent than ever. Please support LD 1268 to help ensure continuity and staffing of the Maine State Ferry Service. Thank you and I would be glad to answer any questions.