

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and Members of the Committee on State and Local Government.

My name is Winifred Malia. I am a Principal Economic Research Analyst, I have worked for the Maine Dept of Labor for over 37 years and I am the current Chapter President of the Eichel-Crinion Chapter of the Maine Service Employee Association. I am submitting this testimony on my own time concerning the chronic staffing issues and the state employee pay gap for Maine's Executive Branch workers in LD 1265, LD 1539, and LD1744.

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, and vocational rehabilitation, labor market information, and economic stability from the 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 is made more difficult as the pay gap continues without any meaningful progress to close it.

The pay gap is causing positions to remain vacant or employees to accept positions elsewhere. 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.

For the past 25+ years, study after study has concluded that there is a real pay gap for state workers when compared to other public and private employers in the state and New England. The State picks and chooses positions that qualify for "stipends" so positions can be filled while the rest of the workforce's pay gap is ignored. This is hurting morale of current workers and the recruitment and retention of new workers. The last study, even with its flaws, still showed the pay gap remained the same even with the cost of living raises in the contracts over the last 6 years.

The last legislature passed pay increase for the next Governor and this Legislature's salaries doubled while state employees are left to wait again for another study to be completed and then to wait to bargain for the implementation of the "fix." State employees are tired of the can being kick down the road again.

I am asking that you support the workers of the Dept of Labor and other Executive Branch employee that serve the citizens of the State of Maine every day by addressing chronic staffing issues and closing the pay gap by passing LD 1265, LD 1539, and LD 1744.

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