

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury members of the state and local government committee.

My name is Steven Fritzsche and I'm here on my own time to talk about the chronic staffing issues and the employee pay gap affecting my colleagues and I directly as well as the public service we deliver to Mainers through the Office of MaineCare Services. I urge you to support executive branch workers through LD 1265, LD 1539 and LD 1744.

I serve as a policy writer for children's and behavioral healthcare services. I'm here in my own capacity on my own time. I am not speaking as a representative of the Department.

My colleagues and I are among the best and brightest, most talented and dedicated public servants. We ensure that hundreds of thousands of low-income Mainers get to see a doctor or nurse when they're sick, can recover from substance use, get behavioral healthcare when they're struggling, and get help caring for their loved ones. For me, the failure to adequately invest in the public servants like myself means that I delay major steps in my life because I can't afford them. I watch my peers in the nonprofit and private sectors start to build their lives, settle down, and begin their families while my wage increases don't even keep up with the rise in the cost of living.

It also means that over time inadequate staffing, inadequate wages, and inadequate retention means that a vital, strong service begins to atrophy. It means healthcare policies become outdated, our office fails to take advantage of opportunities for federal resources, healthcare providers don't get help navigating a complex system, and MaineCare members experience hurdles and delays in getting the care they deserve.

I'm tremendously proud of my work developing crisis services. When this project is complete, it's going to be life-saving. But because of delays we've lost out on all the help this could have brought to Mainers in crisis, as well as significant federal funding opportunities, simply because my colleagues and I don't have enough help. We're passionate public servants, we efficiently work alongside our partner offices in the Department of Health and Human Services, and we need your support.

Thank you for your time. I urge the committee to support my work and that of my co-workers through LD 1265, LD 1539, and LD 1744.