

February 20, 2026

Testimony in Support of the Governor's Proposed Budget

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and other members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, **and** Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, thank you for the work you do on behalf of our Great State and for taking time to hear from members of the public.

My name is Neal Young and I work at Lawrence High School as a social studies teacher and I live in Vassalboro. I am here today to testify in support of the Governor's proposed budget and, more specifically, this budget's support for teachers

The reason why I teach is best captured by a quote from Ronald Reagan: "Freedom is a fragile thing and is never more than one generation away from extinction." I reference this line at the start of each semester and explain to students that they have a difficult but essential role to play in our democracy. My job is to teach them how to engage in our democracy but, more importantly, help them see how much their voices matter.

I have been doing this for ten years and many days I genuinely feel that I have the best job in the world. Many do not make it this long and I understand why.

More than once, especially earlier in my career, I have told my wife that I am sorry. Sorry that I needed to work late into the night, sorry that I am not present because I am worried about a student, sorry that I am emotionally exhausted. I am even sorry that, despite having a stockpile of sick days, she has to be the one to miss work when our daughter is sick because creating sub plans would take more than I have to give that day.

Many of these things are inevitable sacrifices we all must make. By passing this budget we can, however, make so fewer teachers have to say to their husband or wife that they are sorry being a teacher means they can never afford a house, that they have to wait to start a family, or even have to pick up a second job just to get by. Raising the minimum teacher salary to \$50,000 will not solve everything, but it is a start that will make it possible for more young educators to stay in this profession without having to say "I'm sorry."