

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,
My name is Stephanie Wigginton and I work as a Spanish teacher at Noble Middle and High School in North Berwick. I live in the town of Alfred.

I am a third generation public school teacher. Collectively, my grandmother, mother, aunt, sisters and myself have given over 100 years of service to educating children. I spent my childhood training to be a teacher: playing school in my bedroom, sharing the stories of Tomie dePaola and Patricia Pollacco baby dolls and teddy bears. By third grade, I had top notch bulletin board skills and I had mastered the xerox machine.

My dad always told us, "Do something you love and you'll never work a day in your life." Turns out, my dad was right, and today I am fortunate to have a job that doesn't feel like work, it feels like a calling. It feels like *I get to* not *I have to* walk into my classroom every morning and do what I love. Not only do *I get to* work in a job I love, I get to do it living in one of the most beautiful places I've ever been.

Unfortunately, every part of my teaching experience hasn't been as easy as following the call to enter the classroom. Despite having one of the highest costs of living across the nation, Maine has among the lowest beginning teacher salaries, 37th in fact. I am currently in my 10th year of teaching, I have a graduate degree and I still do not yet make \$60k annually. I'm blessed to be the mother of three awesome kids but we are a single parent family and my \$58k simply isn't enough. The last few years I have worked multiple jobs in order to provide for my children and myself. One job should be enough.

I understand that the proposed budget brings the minimum starting teacher salary to \$50k over the next 3 years and while that is certainly positive progress, it is simply too slow. Staff shortages are real, teachers and administrators are feeling the stress of this crisis now. Slowly inching up teacher pay while we are in the midst of a crisis, is the equivalent of shoveling sand with a spoon. Other states across the country with a similar cost of living also have starting teacher salaries reflective of that cost. It is time for Maine to follow suit.

I urge you to pass the governor's supplemental budget and accelerate the implementation timeline to 2 years. Take this opportunity to send a clear message in support of Maine's educators and students. Otherwise, we risk losing generations of educators who are called to teach but simply cannot afford to do so in Maine.