

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the committee:

My name is Kelly Smith, and I'm here today to urge you to **restore the \$56 million that was removed from the State Salary Plan last year** as part of this supplemental budget.

Executive Branch employees are the people who keep Maine running; processing benefits, collecting revenue, supporting public safety, maintaining IT systems, operating our agencies, and serving the public in every corner of the state. When the salary plan is shorted, it doesn't just affect the employees; it affects the services Mainers rely on.

For the last **eight months**, we have been working **without a contract** while the Mills Administration continues to point to "not enough money" as the reason for offering **insulting increases that don't even keep up with the cost of living**. Meanwhile, groceries, electricity, heating fuel, rent, and car repairs keep climbing. Employees are making impossible choices, taking on extra work, and falling behind. Not because we're irresponsible, but because our pay is not keeping pace with reality.

At the same time, the workforce is stretched thin. **Vacancies are everywhere**. When a position sits empty, the work doesn't disappear; it gets piled onto the employees who remain. That means higher workloads, longer backlogs, more stress, less time to train new staff, and less ability to deliver timely, accurate services. It's not sustainable, and it's not fair to the public or the employees who are holding the system together.

Restoring the \$56 million to the salary plan is a concrete step you can take right now to stop making the state government run on vacancies and burnout. It signals that Maine is serious about recruiting and retaining the skilled workforce needed to keep services reliable, responsive, and strong.

So, my question to you is simple: **Will you help ensure our beautiful home state continues to run better, not more stretched, by supporting the people who keep Maine open every day?** Please restore the full **\$56 million** to the State Salary Plan and invest in the employees who make government work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.