

Perry Testimony

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee. Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and members of the State and Local Government committee. My name is Stefanie Perry; I am here testifying on my own personal time. Thank you for taking the time to listen to us who work at the State of Maine as you consider how to prioritize spending the state surplus.

I am proudly employed with DHHS, Office for Family Independence, and represent the MSEA-SEIU Local 1989, Capitol Western Chapter. I am asking for the State of Maine to add 56 million dollars to our salary budget from the current budget surplus amount of \$250 million. Our goal is to close the pay gap for State Workers by funding fair wages for all employees; this money would be a tremendous help. I would like to start by saying one obvious notion—no one works for the state of Maine to become rich or wealthy. Every colleague I have had in my 3 roles with the State of Maine has joined the work force to earn an honest living and support their local communities.

Utilizing these surplus funds to allow for fair wage increases will automatically improve the services we provide to Mainers. I am an Eligibility Specialist in the long-term care unit of Portland, Maine. We have seen great turnover and hiring challenges due to low starting wages, and inflation. Did you know that some people in my department, state workers, qualify for the state benefits that they administer? This is the reality for Executive Branch workers across the state of Maine. This is not okay and we need your help.

Increasing pay means increasing retention. More retention and staff means that the most vulnerable populations will not have to wait for critical services and care; such as Nursing Facility benefits or SNAP benefits. Better worker retention means food on the tables of Mainers who wait and go hungry, it means faster care to those who are stuck in their homes with critical illnesses such as dementia..

We do our best to work as quickly as possible, but understaffed departments will continue to struggle and take additional time to complete responsibilities that directly benefit the Maine people. This is preventable and you can help.

This is the same for public safety workers, and the BMV trying to serve the line that wraps around the building each morning at 7AM.

I ask that you consider the good that will be done for all of us, for all of your constituents, by restoring our salary plan in this budget. I ask you to consider the improvements in quality of life for state employees if their pay increases to a livable wage. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.