

February 25, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs.

My name is Kerem Gungor. I am a senior environmental engineer at DEP Bureau of Land Resources. I am writing this testimony on my own time to express my opinions on how LD 2212 (Supplemental Budget Bill) currently falls short, but can support the important work that my fellow coworkers and I do for Maine's citizens, environment, and ecosystem. I am specifically asking this committee to work to restore the \$56 million that was taken from the state's personal services budget after the attrition rate was increased to 6% in the biennial budget.

My Bureau administrates day-to-day implementation of the State laws, including but not limited to, the Natural Resources Protection Act, Stormwater Management Law, and Site Location of Development Act. My coworkers and I are consistently busy with licensing, compliance, and enforcement activities. We respond to many customer inquiries every day. Our work is crucial for on-the-ground implementation of the laws that human activities do not jeopardize our cherished environment and public safety.

I supervise the Stormwater Engineering Team. Our customers rely on our technical expertise to ensure that stormwater from land development projects is properly managed to protect our waters from degradation, public and private infrastructure from flooding. My team currently has one senior environmental engineer, one environmental engineer, and three assistant environmental engineers. We have one environmental engineer position vacant.

Since I assumed this supervisory position in March 2022, I have been working to recruit talent and fill all the positions I supervise. Unfortunately, I have not been able to reach that goal yet. I tried to recruit for the vacant environmental engineer position which requires the successful candidate to have "professional engineer" license issued by the State Board of Licensure for Professional Engineers. None of the applicants were qualified for the position; hence, we could not move forward with interviews and fill the position. Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence confirmed by other engineering supervisors I conferred with.

Non-competitive salary is a major reason that hampers recruitment. In response to my Union, MSEA's efforts to close pay gap, stipends for assistant and full environmental engineers have been slightly increased by two-percentage points. As happens with similar piecemeal improvements, the stipend raise was not done equitably. For instance, senior environmental engineers' stipends remained the same.

Another example of evidence that demonstrates the non-competitive nature of the current pay schedule is as follows: successful candidates almost always negotiate to start at a higher step since Step 1 pay offered to new employees by policy is too low for most candidates to accept. Supervisory staff like me allocate a significant amount of our time into employee recruitment efforts and find themselves unable to fill vacancies due to the pay gap which is beyond our control. I must note that engineering salaries have been following an upward trend as

demonstrated by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Salary Report published last year: average annual salary increases were 6%. Currently, the state of Maine says they cannot afford to offer more than a 2% wage increase due to the attrition rate increase I mentioned earlier in my testimony. This trend, if unaddressed, will certainly make engineer recruitment and retention for state service more challenging. We need your support to allow the State to improve compensation for state workers and for all public sector engineering positions.

I believe that it is past time to address the pay gap and re-adjust the base pay schedules to eliminate the need for stopgap measures like providing stipends for the engineers.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my personal testimony on this important issue. Please work to restore the \$56 million in funding to the personal services budget with the budget surplus before you.

Respectfully submitted,
Kerem Gungor
Oakland