

Testimony of Emily Albee

LD 1064-Ought to Pass
An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
April 6, 2023

Senator Pierce and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Emily Albee. I am a resident of Orono and the 2022 Penobscot County Teacher of the Year. In this written testimony, I am speaking to you as a private citizen and not as a representative of any school, district, or organization. I am in favor of LD1064 and I urge you to support raising minimum salaries for teachers in Maine.

My personal teaching journey began during the 2008 recession. I actively searched for unavailable full time teaching positions which is a stark contrast to the current number of available teaching positions in Maine. I continued to study and work as a graduate student at the University of Maine which provided me with full time employment as I secured my first teaching position as a 25% Social Studies Teacher. I was so excited to have my own classroom and work with students. I quickly realized there is no such thing as a 25% teacher except in salary and lack of benefits. I continued to work at the University of Maine and teach part time for 5 years before finally achieving a full time teaching status with benefits. I have 3 degrees (2 are advanced degrees) from the University of Maine and innumerable experiences from working multiple jobs. As I approach my 40s and 13 years in the classroom, I still need to work extra jobs to supplement my teaching salary. This financial reality does create unnecessary stress and burden for my family and makes me feel like I will be forced out of a profession that I love so I can pay my bills. I have personally witnessed friends and colleagues leaving the teaching profession mid-year at alarming rates switching to better paying jobs with better working conditions.

I love my job and I love working with young people. The teaching profession is currently vulnerable to not attracting and retaining qualified candidates of high quality because of the discrepancy of teacher salaries around the state. New teachers with student loan debt are not going to apply to teaching jobs with ineffective salaries that will not support their financial reality. The top of the teacher scale is currently the only valued compensation in the field. The definition of longevity has changed in the 21st century teaching profession. Surviving until year 25 as a teacher to achieve appropriate compensation is not a helpful or sustainable strategy to recruit and retain teachers. Currently, it is a big deal for a veteran teacher to make it to year 10 in the classroom.

Please support incrementally increasing minimum first year teacher salaries to not only attempt to close the disparate financial gap around the great state of Maine but to begin to ease the financial hardships so many new professionals are experiencing. Supporting this bill provides the vital first step in attempting to address the problem of increasing salaries for all teachers in Maine. Accomplishing this first step, then leads to setting a professional tone that veteran teachers deserve salaries reflective of their skills, experience, and expertise. Veteran teachers are working harder than ever to mentor and support the revolving door of teachers entering and quickly exiting the classroom. Teacher's working conditions are the learning conditions for students. The teaching profession requires financial investment at all experience levels to provide the best education possible for students in Maine. I urge the Committee to unanimously vote ought to pass. Thank you.

Emily Albee
Orono
LD 1064

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