

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and other members of the Educational and Cultural Committee,

My name is Andrew Van Horn, and I currently work as a custodian at Hampden Academy in Hampden. I've been an employee of RSU22 since 2018 and in my short time with the district I have consistently seen the need to increase wages for support staff. It is my belief that LD955 will lead to an environment that increasingly values support staff. Working as a support staff member has been a transformative experience for me, connecting me with my community in a way that I would never have considered when I was younger. I believe that LD955 and bills like it would serve to draw in a younger pool of employees while increasing the longevity of commitment to the work of supporting education, which is regularly changing and evolving.

When I started working as a custodian at Reeds Brook Middle School in 2018 my work was more or less what I expected, focused solely on cleaning. But as I became more experienced, known and trusted within the school community my duties eventually grew to include stopping traffic to keep the students safe, monitoring student lunches, and participating in the after school tabletop gaming club. During the COVID shutdown, while teachers and administrators were doing nearly all their work from home, the custodians and other support staff members were labeled as essential workers and were asked to risk their health to keep school facilities as operational as possible to best serve our communities.

It is my belief that LD955 and bills like it are a good way to show that we're also essential enough to pay a living wage. Education support staff member's value should not be based solely on educational credits. It's surprising how often those fail to reflect a person's actual intelligence, or their commitment to education overall. Paying people an initially higher wage would serve to attract a greater number of candidates who would find value in the work done to support education. There have been positions in the custodial department at RSU22 that went unfilled for over a year, placing strain on a staff already stretching to accommodate for a lack of resources. I hope this letter serves to illuminate the need to pay education support staff members, the people who keep our schools open and operational, more. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Andrew Van Horn