

TO: The Honorable Michael Tipping
The Honorable Amy Roeder, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor

DATE: March 18th, 2025

RE: LD 112, An Act to Promote Opportunities by Establishing a Student Wage

Dear Senator Tipping and Representative Roeder,

My name is Kleanthi Cunningham. I'm a resident of Dresden. I am here today as a member of LWVME's Youth Council. This program helps young people to explore how Maine's government works and build their civic leadership skills. This testimony does not represent LWVME's view, only those of the Youth Council. I am testifying ought not to pass on LD 112.

We have an obligation to protect the young people of Maine, and the passing of LD 112 heightens the potential of employers abusing the lower wages of minors. There has been a recent spike across the whole country in bills aimed at removing child labor laws. Lawmakers disguise these laws as trying to improve job opportunities for minors when it would just be putting them in dangerous and unfair working conditions. The idea that minors should be paid less for the same work than their older coworkers is pure discrimination. A lower minimum wage for minors would encourage employers to hire them, but it could also encourage them only to hire minors and overwork them. Students and minors can put in the same effort and quality of work as any other employee. The FLSA already puts youth at a disadvantage by allowing subminimum wage for babysitting, camp counselors, and newspaper deliveries.

The current minimum wage already makes it difficult for some families to make ends meet, and many teenagers work to support their families. A study showed that raising the minimum wage reduces the likelihood that students from low-income families will drop out of school. Lower wages may force students to leave school to help their parents financially. While some argue that this bill incentivizes companies to hire younger workers, it also discourages them from hiring older employees. If companies can build a workforce of younger workers whom they pay significantly less, they are unlikely to continue hiring individuals in their twenties. These slightly older workers face the same drawbacks for employers, such as less experience, without the benefit of lower wages.

Cutting wages for students under 18 would severely impact their ability to afford college, especially those from lower-income families. Many students work after school and on weekends to save for higher education. While financial aid aims to cover demonstrated need, it often falls short, leaving families and students struggling. Lower wages could discourage students from working altogether, leading to higher dropout rates, absenteeism, and a decrease in student's mental health as they try to balance work and school. This bill will likely prevent students 18 and under from applying and enrolling in college because they are not able to save enough for college with such low pay. Public and private universities recognize this by setting on-campus wages at \$15 per hour or higher to help students stay enrolled. The same logic applies to younger workers who rely on these wages.

The only people who benefit from low student wages are companies who want an excuse to pay their employees less. We should not be lowering student wages but instead advocating for the proper treatment of minors in the workplace. I urge you to vote against this bill to protect students. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.