

## TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 734

### AN ACT TO SET A MINIMUM WAGE FOR SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Labor and Housing Committee. I am Steven Bailey, executive director of Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 734.

When School Boards, working with their superintendents, put together the local school budget, they consider what is needed for the best educational outcomes for students and make their best case to taxpayers on why property tax increases are necessary.

The good news is most school budgets pass in this state because of the groundwork done by boards and superintendents, and their recognition that what is a reasonable increase in some communities will not be accepted in others. They understand their communities and the local employment conditions and the number of retirees versus working families in town.

Simply stated our associations oppose this bill because pay increases have to be in line with reasonable school budgets that local voters will approve and property taxpayers can afford to pay.

Clearly that will differ depending on the community.

In preparation for a similar bill last year, we looked at some salary information from a sample of our schools to identify which positions were above and below \$16.

For secretaries, who comprise the greatest number of hourly employees in our schools, the range was anywhere from 65 to 75 percent at or above \$16 depending on what grade-level was served in their school.

Education Technicians comprise the second largest group of hourly employees. For Education Technician 1s and 2s, roughly 55 percent were at or above \$16. For Education Technician 3s, 63 percent were at or above.

Custodians are our third largest group of employees, and based on our survey, roughly 60 percent were at or above. For cafeteria workers, our fourth largest group, 52 percent of servers were at or above and the cooks were 62 percent at or above.

We have quality people in our schools and want to keep them. This bill, however, would require substantial tax increases in some of our communities or tradeoffs that are not in the best interests of students.

That reality is not mitigated by the fact this bill proposes to have the state pay, on a one-time basis, for this rate increase. We believe it is still an unfunded mandate. It raises the overall cost of education and that could put future school budgets in jeopardy, as well as erode the support we currently have from local property taxpayers.