

Serina DeWolfe

99 Cottage Rd

Gray, ME

LD 1279-An Act to Increase the Minimum Wage

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and distinguished members of the Labor and Housing Committee,

My name is Serina DeWolfe of Gray and I am speaking today in favor of LD 1279-An Act to Increase the Minimum Wage. I currently work as a staff representative for American Federation of Teachers in Maine. I represent 600+ union members in various areas including rural healthcare facilities. The majority of our members in healthcare are CNAs but we also represent medical technicians, food service workers, administrative staff and custodians.

Negotiations at healthcare facilities are always a struggle. Funds going into the facilities are based on the Medicare, Medicaid and MaineCare reimbursement rates. When we negotiate with healthcare facility employers, we hear the same stories: the facilities can only afford a .10 cent an hour wage increase for their non-management employees because they are only reimbursed based on rates from 4-5 years ago. It is discouraging and disappointing that the very workers that we have called "our HEROES" during the COVID-19 pandemic are collateral damage during a constant battle over government controlled reimbursement rates.

We have one rural healthcare facility in Milbridge who received \$489,000.00 in forgivable PPP loans in late summer of 2020 (they received others after that as well) but this only translated to \$1.00/hr in hazard pay and a small bonus for two months last summer for our union members.

Our members work in nursing homes where the pandemic has been widespread and it has been a struggle to recruit and retain new employees/union members. Our facilities have had to rely on agency nurses to take care of the elderly residents. Most of the time there is no incentive to work at these nursing homes because the pay is so low, the healthcare costs are very high and it is extremely hard work with high turnover rates. LD 1279 would consistently increase the minimum wage which would reward the current employees who are dedicated to their work AND also help recruit and retain new employees at our nursing facilities.

We support this bill to gradually increase the minimum wage in Maine because quite frankly without it, some of our members would get no COLA or other wage increases.