

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
LD734: An Act To Set a Minimum Wage for School Support Staff; and
LD1279: An Act To Increase the Minimum Wage

Nate Williams, Director of Collective Bargaining & Research
Maine Education Association
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor & Housing

April 12, 2021

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and the other esteemed members of the Committee on Labor and Housing:

My name is Nate Williams, and I am the Director of Collective Bargaining and Research for the Maine Education Association (MEA) which represents 24,000 teachers, education support professionals, and retired educators across Maine.

I am here to testify in support of LD 734, An Act to Set a Minimum Wage for School Support Staff; and LD 1279, An Act to Increase the Minimum Wage.

These bills would raise the minimum wage to \$16 per hour for school support employees by July 1, 2022, and for all workers in Maine by January 1, 2025. These bills are needed to attract and retain the best school employees and raise the standard of living for all workers in Maine.

A review of our contracts database shows the following starting wages below \$16 per hour:

- 32 of 68 bus driver contracts (47%)
- 69 of 74 cook/food service contracts (93%)
- 82 of 98 custodian contracts (84%)
- 112 of 118 ed tech I contracts (95%)
- 103 of 125 ed tech II contracts (82%)
- 78 of 124 ed tech III contracts (65%)
- 63 of 83 secretarial contracts (76%)

These are the people we depend on to get students to school, ensure they are fed, provide a clean and safe physical environment, serve students that need additional attention, and make the business of the school operate efficiently. They all deserve respect. Ensuring that these valuable employees can earn a living wage should be everyone's goal.

In general, raising the minimum wage, and raising it significantly, can have tremendous economic impact that far outweighs any potential negative consequences. Economist Ben Zipperer of the Economic Policy Institute, in reviewing research done on the topic, found that the average study, along with the

best research, indicated little to no downside of raising the minimum wage.¹ In spring 2019, prominent economists in the US and the UK published an analysis of 138 state-level minimum wage changes since 1979, finding that the overall number of low-wage jobs remained unchanged after the increase and that low-wage workers who were already earning above the minimum also saw modest wage increases. In fact, in 2014, the 13 states that raised their minimum wages added jobs at a faster rate than the states that did not, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.²

People who work for a living deserve respect. People who work full-time should be able to support themselves and their families. Dignity and respect should not depend on the size of the paycheck.

In short, raising minimum wages increases economic growth, has minimal negative economic impact, and reduces reliance on government benefits while showing appreciation for those who do the work.

For these reasons, MEA encourages you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 734 and 1279

¹ See *Gradually raising the minimum wage to \$15 would be good for workers, good for businesses, and good for the economy*; Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor, February 7, 2019 <https://www.epi.org/publication/minimum-wage-testimony-feb-2019/>

² See *Raising the Minimum Wage Would Boost an Economic Recovery—and Reduce Taxpayer Subsidization of Low-Wage Work* <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/news/2021/01/27/495163/raising-minimum-wage-boost-economic-recovery-reduce-taxpayer-subsidization-low-wage-work/#:~:text=Raising%20the%20wages%20of%20low,in%20a%20period%20of%20recovery.>