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LD 70

Greetings. My name is Janet Varnum; I am a retired teacher who lives in Bar Harbor, where I taught elementary school for 40 years. I thoroughly enjoyed my career. My husband died in 2018, which basically cut our income in half. He was on Social Security, and as a teacher, I was unable to get any of his benefits. My only son shares my home so that I can continue to live there.

My December electric bill arrived and to my shock, it was \$412, an increase of \$165 over the previous month. My home is not large and we were early adopters of a heat pump. We also added extra insulation last fall.

In anticipation of rate increases, I asked my son last summer to string some clotheslines and I've avoided using the dryer. Not always easy in Maine weather! It helped in the amount of electricity we used, but not in the cost.

On Friday, I had an oil delivery-- \$469.85 for just over 100 gallons. My payment plan spreads my costs out over the year. Even so, my monthly payment increased \$118 over last year. We do supplement with wood.

I always said I didn't work hard all of my life to be cold in my old age-- but now I'm not so sure!

And then, there is the grocery bill. Scary! Quality foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, are like medicine and contribute to good health. So, for example, I buy apples, which are usually over \$2 a pound. Not many apples in a pound! My grocery bill increased by about \$50 a week over last year.

I think you get the picture.

Teachers got the shaft when then Gov. LePage waged a battle to lower the amount of retiree pension COLA. He developed a plan that lowered our COLA from 4% to 3% and based it on the first \$20,000 of our pensions.

Social Security recipients will be getting an unprecedented 8.7% COLA based on their entire benefit. Obviously, the need was recognized, especially with our high inflation.

It's time for the needs of retired teachers to be recognized, too. We have been falling way behind since that change in 2011. Our small COLAs don't allow us to keep up with our living requirements or save for the future. After deductions, my COLA was \$48 last year!

This support might also provide an additional incentive to keep active teachers in place. With the shortages that are occurring, we need to look at ways to incentivize teachers to stay in the profession.

I urge you to support LD 70. Thank you.