



Maine People's Alliance

Senator Tipping, Rep. Roeder and honorable members of the joint standing committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Cate Blackford and I serve as the policy director of the Maine People's Alliance. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on LD 936, An Act to Require Disclosure of Pay Ranges and Record Keeping of Pay History.

Wage transparency is a critical step in the fight for wage equality and for me personally, is a major reason I am home in Maine. I'd like to tell you a story.

A few years ago, I was working in a senior role at a progressive advocacy organization in Colorado. There was so much that I loved about my work: the mission, what we fought for (including a pay equity bill) and the people. While I was there, Colorado implemented its wage transparency law. When a member of the senior staff retired; the posting for his replacement included a salary range. It was eye opening, to say the least, that the role was being posted with an upper range of nearly twice that of the senior women on staff. Then, the man selected as a final candidate negotiated a salary above the range, despite questions about his experience and capacity to succeed in the role. As you can imagine, this sparked discussion, investigation into the organization's 990s, and wage sharing among staff. It turned out this was not a one-off in a tight labor market. The organization was paying male staff 50% more than local market rates and 50%-100% more than its female staff.

I wish I could say that there was a happy ending to this story. Unfortunately, the organization dug in its heels, refused to address the inherent hypocrisy between its external advocacy and internal policies, and instead paid for a bogus study to corroborate its decisions. The lack of action prompted additional questions and exposed additional equity issues. Unsurprisingly, the gender wage disparities were not an isolated incident. The fight over them created a toxic environment, which made it relatively easy, nearly 18 months after the initial salary disclosure, to resign and come home to Maine in the summer of 2020.

In marked contrast, Maine People's Alliance discloses the salary range with every position opening and a link to our union contract. The staff union then reviews all salaries annually. This serves the organization well, as people know up front what we consider fair wages for a position, and there is a check on the unconscious biases that can lead to wage disparities.

For me personally, and for so many others, the lack of salary transparency led to a toxic environment, feelings of betrayal, and unequal outcomes. While salary transparency alone will not overcome all of the reasons we see such stark pay disparities, having it can prevent much of what I experienced. Who knows, it may even create situations that encourage more people to move home to Maine. I urge the committee to vote ought to pass on this important bill.

Thank you and I am happy to respond to any requests for more information.