

Testimony in support of LD 1854, An Act to Complete and Implement the Comprehensive Review of the Classification and Compensation System for Executive Branch Employees, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government My name is Cynthia Barre. As a Maine citizen I am personally providing my written testimony to address concerns of State employment. Thank you for taking the time to listen and to consider our concerns regarding our working conditions.

I started employment with the State of Maine in 2012 after working half of my career in the private sector. I started at MaineCare where the pay was low, the building was sickly, and the job was high stress due to working on many emergent issues. While at MaineCare my team filed an FJA to have our pay scale re-evaluated. It was a long and hard battle which took 5 years. The State fought hard against us. We were not willing to give up and we won. This resulted in moving up one paygrade. By the time this happened I had already left MaineCare and took a new State position.

Currently I work at the Maine Bureau of Insurance. The majority of our job descriptions were written in the 1980's, which is when they were assigned a paygrade. These outdated job descriptions and paygrades are common with the majority of the State's positions.

In 2020 MSEA was successful in getting a Pay Scale Study approved by the State. The study has been completed, however, to date the State has done nothing to consider re-accessing our pay scales. The data in the study reveals that employees in the private sector who have the same job titles and job duties are making considerably more than their counter part does at the State of Maine. Since the study, the MSEA has negotiated our contracts and the State has held strong on not addressing the inequity in our pay, only agreeing to minimal pay raises in each contract negotiation.

Staff retention, and finding the best qualified candidates for State positions, is an issue due to the paygrade of State positions. While I was at MaineCare, Governor LePage put both a hiring freeze and a pay raise freeze on State positions. Due to these two factors if a position became open a new employee could not be hired to fill the position. By the time I left MaineCare I was doing three jobs for the same low paygrade I was hired at. Although today we no longer have a hiring freeze or pay raise freeze the issue of inequity in our pay and staff retention still persists. It is hard to find high quality candidates when they see the pay they will be offered.

Telework is also an issue State employees are greatly concerned about. During contract negotiations the State would not allow telework to be written into our contract. Instead the State said they were developing a telework policy. So far this telework policy has been a moving target as it is changed and been reworded more than once. Telework has been a big plus for my team since the pandemic sent us home to work in March of 2020. My Management tells us our work performance and employee morale has increased since we have started working from home. Telework is also a factor for prospective employees, so many companies are now offering full time telework. Between the paygrade and the lack of permanent telework, Management struggles to find the best qualified candidates to fill our State positions.

I would like to ask the Legislature to address the sick buildings we work in as State employees. Currently my building is closed and employees are either working from home or in a temporary State space due to

our building being unhealthy. Since I have worked for the State I have had multiple lung infections and health issues due to toxic air quality in the buildings I have worked in. I have addressed this issue over and over again since 2012 only to have it fall on deaf ears by the Administration. The majority of the State buildings I have been in (for meetings etc.) have made me and others sick.

There are a vast number of State buildings that are in horrible condition and very toxic to employees' health. It would be a significant cost savings to Maine taxpayers to close these old dilapidated buildings and enact a permanent telework policy. I understand this is not an option for all State positions as some employees interface with the public daily, however many employees do not. The State could keep a number of the newer State buildings for employees who must work on site.

In 2021 I was approved through an ADA request form to work from home due to the health ramifications State buildings have caused me. The State put a disclosure in this approval that for the purpose of work operations this approval can be revisited at any time. My long term health ramifications that have been caused by working in these toxic State buildings is not going to change. It is my greatest fear that the State will make me go back to work in a State building. Due to the State's disclosure my ADA approval seems to be the same moving target that our current telework policy is.

I find it both disturbing and sad that I had to fight for nine years and I had to advocate this hard for myself to be allowed to work in healthy working conditions. I can't breathe in State buildings and I have had multiple lung infections due to the condition of the buildings I have worked in. Today I have been working from home for 3 years and I have been breathing freely for these 3 years. I am grateful every day for the privilege of breathing freely. This in itself is sad because breathing freely should not be a privilege, but a right. I hold myself to a high moral standard and I have an excellent work ethic. I ask that my employer respect what I bring to the table with actions that address the concerns of employees. I am about to turn 59 and I thought I would be with the State until I retire. I have been seriously reconsidering this due to the issues I have outlined. Employment elsewhere has become an option that I am researching and considering.

Thank you for your time.

Cynthia Barre