

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government:

I am a State Employee. I have worked at the Maine State Library since 2001. I am asking you to support LD 1854. I am a single mom of two kids, 17 and almost 19. I am not single by choice. Three years ago, I had to remove my then husband (stepfather to my kids) from our home to protect my then 16-year-old daughter from him. I knew it likely would cause financial hardship but regardless of the financial consequences, I had to do what was necessary to protect my daughter, Natalie.

A year later, Natalie began her first job at the age of 17, having just obtained her driver's license which enabled her to transport herself from our rural town. Hired at a boat yard as yard crew, she began earning \$14.00 an hour. By the end of that summer, she was earning \$16 an hour, just \$1.00 an hour less than what I was making. Her second summer working the same position for the same company, she was earning \$19 an hour, \$2.00 an hour more than me. As a college student, this helps her tremendously and takes a little pressure off me.

Even though Natalie does not receive other benefits from her summer job such as retirement, health or dental, (the latter two come out of my paycheck), it still doesn't seem right that an 18-year-old is currently making \$2.00 an hour more than her mom who has been in the work force for 37 years and at the same job for 21. Don't get me wrong; I am very happy that Natalie's job enables her to purchase things for herself that I am unable to such as clothes, personal care items, school textbooks, & living expenses while at college. She works hard and I am so proud of her. But at the same time, I am deeply grieved. How does she look at me as her mother and only adult supporter in her life? Does she see me as a failure? With the lack of money and resources that I have, I would not blame her if she did. I can tell you that I do feel like a failure. I can only hope my example will help motivate her to far exceed me.

I am also a single homeowner, having been in the same home for 13 years. With the rising cost of living expenses, it's been extremely difficult to make ends meet. Especially over this last year with cost of groceries, taxes, gas, heating oil, etc....on the rise, I am not able to pay everything on time. My home desperately needs repairs but that is not in my budget.

It deeply grieves me that my son Kaleb, now 17, should be taking driver's ed but that is simply not in my budget. I can't even imagine buying him a used vehicle so that he would be able to get himself to a job from our small, rural town. He needs braces. That is also not in my budget.

Residing in an 1150 square foot modest home we live modestly. My vehicle is 8 years old with over 100,000 miles. I have canceled cable tv and since canceled Netflix in an effort to cut out anything we do not need. We don't go out to eat. We don't order take out. We don't go on vacations or even take day trips anymore. I run my errands on my way home from work, to save money on gas and wear and tear on my vehicle so that I can stay home on weekends and holidays. This affects my social life and emotional health as well as my son's. He has both social anxiety and PTSD and because of these emotional issues, working a second job outside the home, leaving him home alone nights and weekends, is not an option for me. I am also homeschooling him.

I've been unable to support my aging, widowed mother who truly needs my help, especially maintaining her yard. She does it alone, often exhausted, and sore for days after. An only child, I have no siblings to help. I feel like a failure as not only a parent but as a daughter as well. I struggle with guilt daily because

I should be making a trip to her house once or twice a week but the cost of gas & wear and tear on my vehicle has been too much.

Despite the struggle, I try to focus on the positives and to be thankful for all that we do have. My kids and I have each other and we have a roof over our heads, but it's increasingly becoming more and more difficult to remain positive with the financial weight that I carry. I am greatly concerned that in a year from now, I may not be able to keep our home without a miracle, as I will no longer be receiving child support. I am losing sleep most nights due to anxiety over this. My mortgage payment along with insurance and taxes is currently \$1150 each month. In one paycheck I bring home \$1069.23. That will leave me with roughly about \$1000 a month for groceries for my family, heating oil, cell phone for my son & I, internet (needed for homeschooling) gas, car expenses, utilities, medical co-pays, etc... I have recently found out that property taxes in my town will likely increase to 24% this next fiscal year due to the high school leaving the RSU system. I just don't know how I will manage this.

My widowed mom only has a 2-bedroom home and moving in with her to share resources is not an option until my kids are both fully on their own. Even if my mom's house was larger, after suffering through repeated childhood trauma at the hands of their biological father & emotional abuse by their stepfather who was an alcoholic, (my daughter suffered more than emotional abuse), my kids truly need a few more years of stability. My daughter just finished her freshman year of college and is aiming for a doctorate degree in psychology and will need a place to come home to for several more years. My son likely won't be ready to be on his own until well into his early adult hood years due to issues of trauma in his life. I am concerned. I don't want the three of us to be living on the street with nowhere to go. I don't have outside support. I am it and the anxiety I feel is almost paralyzing at times.

No Mainer should have to be concerned about losing their home or worry about how they are going to support and provide for their family. I know that I am not alone in this. The costs of living for all of us is going up but our wages are not. I want to be able to retire as a state employee and feel good about my job but when my teenage daughter earns \$2.00 more money than I do...this needs to change.

Please support LD #1854 and help hard-working state employees like me to be able to provide for their families & remain in their homes.

Sincerely,

Jonica Garland