



Maine Equal Justice  
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**MEJ 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**

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Good morning, Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Kathy Kilrain del Rio, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm the Advocacy and Programs Director for Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. We are testifying today in support of LD 1854.

A big part of the work MEJ does is assist Mainers with low incomes in accessing needed supports and programs that are managed by state agencies. These programs help people across our state put food on their tables, maintain a safe place to live, access education and training so they can increase their financial security, navigate the loss of employment, access necessary health care, and so much more. To help people with meeting their basic needs, MEJ works closely with multiple state agencies and greatly appreciates the variety of vital work done by state workers.

Strong state government is necessary for our safety net programs to run smoothly and meet the needs of low-income Mainers. And state workers are the backbone of our state agencies. When someone is struggling to feed their family, access Unemployment Insurance, access health care to treat serious medical issues, or facing other financial challenges that threaten their wellbeing or the wellbeing of their children, they need prompt responses from state agencies. Long wait-times and stretched workers with huge workloads weaken the ability of older Mainers, families, and others in need to access safety net services.

Chronic problems with recruiting and maintaining staff for these important positions prevent Maine people from getting the services they need when they need them. That's why we need to complete and implement the review of our state compensation and classification system. State positions must be competitive to attract and keep a strong workforce.

It's also why creating a structure for regularly performing a compensation study every two years and conducting a comprehensive classification review every 10 years is so important. I spend a lot of time in the Health and Human Services Committee and have seen how our health care workforce deteriorates when reimbursement rates are left to languish for years. In response, through legislation passed in the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislature, the Office of MaineCare Services

proposed a structure for regular review of all rates on specific timelines so that we can respond to changing costs of delivering care – which includes labor costs – in a more timely manner. That process has begun, and I believe we will see over time that it will strengthen our health care workforce. In the same way, the compensation and classification structure created by LD 1854 would strengthen the workforce for our state government – and that benefits us all.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you today. We urge you to pass LD 1854 and I'm happy to answer any questions.