

Dear members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Katharine Rehm, I live in Augusta, and I'm writing on my own time in support of LD 1854.

I've been working for the state for 7 years. I hit my pay cap in the middle of COVID. My husband also works for the state, he's been here for over ten years and has also hit his pay cap. We have a 3 year old and a 10 month old. We pay a mortgage and have two vehicles that we make payments on. I have student loans. Prices have gone up on groceries, clothing, over the counter medicine, diapers, formula, toiletries, you name it. The cost of daycare, propane to heat our home, electricity, and other utilities and services have also risen. We used to be able to afford to live and stay well above water, we even had savings tucked away. But throughout the pandemic with all of the rising costs, and no raises or pay increases of any kind, we're barely treading water. It's nearly impossible for either of us to promote within state work, because the only types of jobs that are offered above our level are management, or require a degree in the field of expertise, for example social worker roles get paid more but you need to have a social work background or a degree. I went to art school. My husband did not get the opportunity to go to college because he was forced to raise his younger siblings for a few years (with no help from the state! It was a 'foster care' situation but he was put into a corner and because he was family they told him he could not be compensated for any of it). I digress. We receive emails for 'training opportunities' such as classes to help us be able to promote within DHHS, but it requires supervisor approval. The supervisor never approves of it because we are so shorthanded. So we're not even able to take a 2 hour CLASS that will help us get a foot in the door of a higher paying job WITHIN the department, because of operational need. How is that fair? The only reason either of us continues to work for DHHS, is because we make just enough money that we do not qualify for SNAP or Medicaid. So if we left, we would lose our health insurance and be forced to apply for marketplace health insurance with very high deductibles. We're part of the 'middle class' but it's felt more like like 'lower class' without all of the help from the state that our clients are receiving. We weren't offered help with heating expenses, we were not given stipends, we were not given maximum food stamp allotments, etc. We still struggle to make ends meet and barely live paycheck to paycheck. We have to put all of our medical bills into a third party account and make small payments on it. We don't get to travel or go on vacations. We might have to take second jobs pretty soon. When I took the job for the state 7 years ago, I was so happy and excited because I could officially quit my THREE jobs that I was working at that time to make ends meet, and I didn't even have kids then. I was finally able to get a FULL TIME job with decent pay and health insurance. Now I'm back where I started!! CLOSE THE PAY GAP!! Also, we shouldn't have to work OVERTIME in order to cover the work that we're supposed to complete during a regular 40 hour work week. Other states offer better pay along with benefits and health insurance for the SAME POSITION that I currently work in. The same states have relatively the same cost of living expenses. We are likely going to move out of state if we don't see a change happen soon. Then you'll be losing TWO state employees who have invested 7 and ten + years of dedication and hard work into DHHS OFI. We are starting to feel like numbers and not people anymore. We are starting to feel like we don't

matter, that the only people in Maine that matter are the low income clients we serve. We deserve to be respected, protected and PAID a fair wage for the hard work we do. Please pass LD 1854 and close the state employee pay gap!