

Testimony – LD 1854
Bobbie Shay

A little over three years ago I left my job as a Police Records Technician in California and moved home to Maine. I had been wanting to return home for years so I could help my mother and enjoy “the way life should be” once more. I knew even though I would be making less at my new job as Office Associate II with the state, the cost of living was significantly less than California and thought the State's health insurance and benefits would make up for the shortfall. This of course turned out to be the beginning of COVID and the cost of living skyrocketed ever since.

After moving back, I found myself in my late 30's living once more with a parent. We thought our two paychecks would be able to cover the cost of our living. Like many others we found ourselves with the stress of living paycheck to paycheck. We both worked through the pandemic and only benefited with Governor Mill's few relief checks for everyone.

I was never an employee to complain. I take pride in my work and wanted a job I could stay at for years and thrive. I arrived in my current position with years of experience and served the citizens and visitors of Maine daily with the professionalism and friendliness that people expect from our quaint state. With my arrival, the department had more specialized expertise than it ever had before. We had made improvements to every part of our division, but my wage didn't represent the work and service I brought to the job daily.

After understanding the title of Office Associate II more, it occurred to me we were working out of class. I submitted my FJA on February 8, 2022 to get reclassified. With full support of my supervisors, it has taken me 15 months to obtain a new title. I'm one of the lucky ones. Currently I wait for the retro pay to help the cost-of-living debt incurred during the process. Since the FJA process started over a year ago, my only direct co-worker retired and I worked solo as the position was filled. It took 2 listings to fill the position. I believe the generalized job title and low pay made it difficult to fill.

Growing up as a Mainer I was taught hard work pays off. It appears that may no longer be the case. As a State of Maine employee I'm not making enough to live in today's State of Maine. Our wages can not compete with money coming from out of state. Our housing and costs of living are considered a deal for the rest of New England but simply too much for most residents. The small raises we received last year helped and were greatly appreciated but had little effect with the growing cost of winter heating and food. While waiting for the reclass I was tempted daily at the idea of finding better pay and felt like a fool for being so loyal. One day this wage gap will become too wide and many will be left with no other choice.

Closing the pay gap would be night and day in quality of life. Like many employees we're not asking to become millionaires, simple asking for enough to live and thrive. Enough money so we in turn can support our communities, small businesses and trades year round. Enough money to raise a family here. It's time to invest in the future of Maine State Employees. We're here and want to stay. Help us.