

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

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

My name is Connor Smith and I am testifying on my own time. I am a Procurement Analyst II for DAFS, the State Department responsible for overseeing every purchase made by State of Maine Agencies.

I am here to today to discuss the importance of increased funding to both our agencies and our workforce. Staffing shortages are going to become an increasing problem over the coming years, and significant funding is the only way to combat the issue. An aging workforce is going to see a substantial increase in vacancies, vacancies that will not be filled at the current pay rates. My department alone is seeing two retirements within the next six months. These retirees are public servants who have taken on significantly more work than their roles would normally require, because 30 years of experience provides expertise that cannot be taught over night to new hires.

The cost of living, especially rental prices, have skyrocketed throughout the state of Maine over the last few years. One-bedroom apartments under \$1,500 a month are few and far between, and rarely in places people want to live let alone start a family. To be frank, I am only able to work for the State because my education was paid for through military service.

The current pay gap has become so extreme that there will be no hiring college graduates struggling with student loans on top of the increased price of living. The phrase “do more with less” will not fill positions or allow workers to keep up with demands as people leave for well-deserved retirements.

Turnaround times within my department are expected to be within five days for RFPs, RFAs, or selection packages – something we feel is necessary to keep our government functioning. It is difficult to see how our department, or any department, can continue to provide timely service when our workforce continues to downsize and positions cannot be filled by qualified workers do to the pay gap. Raises that fail to meet interest rates are not raises, but pay cuts. As things currently stand, State employment is not an avenue to the middle class, but a sentence to live pay check to pay check.

Recruitment and retention need to be the primary focus of the State if they intend to continue functioning while dealing with the retirement of one of the oldest work forces in the nation.

I appreciate your time and consideration and hope that the wellbeing of those who have dedicated their lives to State service will a remain a priority for you all.