

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Staci Warren. I am writing on my own personal time in support of LD 1854, An Act to Complete and Implement the Comprehensive Review of the Classification and Compensation System for Executive Branch Employees, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine.

In 2020, I left my job in higher education to take a supervisory position within the Department of Education. Over the past 3 years I have had the privilege of working with some of the most dedicated employees within the DOE and across the state. I came into the office to manage and organize the administrative work due to the number of staff within our team of fourteen.

Within a year, the team was divided into two teams: the Office of School and Student Supports (OSSS) which now has 18 full-time employees, and two contractors, and the Maine School Safety Center (MSSC), which is woefully underfunded with a staff of eight and that I support as the sole administrative staff person on top of the work I do for OSSS. I continue to work for both teams, at a capacity that now has become unmanageable and yet there is no money to hire another administrative person despite efforts to do so. I cannot give MSSC the support they need and maintain the level of excellence that I expect to give them.

At this same time, I was also informed that when a former colleague resigned, the work was redistributed and I would be expected to pick up 1/3 of her work responsibilities temporarily managing foster care. The other two thirds of the position was dispersed to two of my co-workers. In addition to foster care, I was also delegated to be the point person to take incoming calls through the automated system regarding bullying, harassment, racism, IEP laws, and discipline.

I hold a bachelor's degree in childhood development. I am not trained as a social worker, crisis counselor or mediator for foster care issues, IEP resolution, bullying prevention or bullying law. A good amount of my time is spent forwarding calls via emails to appropriate people while trying to maintain all of the work and supervision that I have to do. Other than watching a video on foster care, I received no training or additional compensation, due to lack of funding.

Placing additional work assignments on the already full plates of MDOE employees with little support, is not best practice. In the almost 3 years that I have been in the MDOE (all of which has been during one of the most unprecedented times in education due to the onset and continuation of COVID 19), several of my colleagues have left the department to return to jobs either in Maine schools where they can earn similar pay with greater time off, or to the private sector for higher pay.

I am writing this to you to express my sincere concern with how my colleagues are contemplating, at alarming rates, the desire to leave state government service to return to the private sector because of wage disparity. The Maine Department of Education has specialized employees who are dedicated to serving Maine schools in all capacities for the greater good of our youth. At the end of the day, regardless of how rewarding the job, if we are not fairly compensated for the work we do, a pat on the back and a message of gratitude doesn't help keep us motivated the job for long.

Our highly skilled MDOE staff are leaving. We need to take a serious look at how we can turn this around. It is my responsibility to support team members so that they can do what they are experts at, and that's supporting students and schools and making sure that Maine schools are safe. If I can't get my work done, then the teams can't do their work. I will continue to advocate for this work but I also ask that we also be seen, cared for and valued for the work that we do every single day for the betterment of all Maine people in our schools and communities.

Thank you.
Staci Warren
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