

Kyle Parks
Portland
LD 2121

Greetings Committee Member(s):

I'm submitting my testimony in favor of LD 2121 electronically. I'm a state worker approaching my 5 year anniversary with the Maine CDC working in health promotion for the WIC program. I joined the WIC program, as a considerable salary cut for many of the same reasons my colleagues did; the sacrifice in pay (at the time) was a reasonable tradeoff to pursue a work-life balance while furthering the mission and vision of the Maine CDC and our own vision and mission at WIC.

Over the years, however, (particularly post-pandemic) the trade-off has become increasingly unrealistic. I find through conversation with my non-SOM friends and peers, I'm compensated far less than what those individuals would have thought. To apply for the position I hold with Maine CDC, a graduate-level degree was strongly encouraged (borderline required) which I possess, but I find the strongest reason I remain in SOM service is participation in the PSLF program. I absolutely rely on this program so that my graduate education investment can be paid for because SOM simply does not compensate workers at my level appropriately to not need this safety net and even with that benefit (which is not technically a direct benefit of working for SOM) the pathway to financial independence at any level in comparison to who were in my position 10-15 years ago is largely unattainable.

To allow myself to not stay financially stagnant, I work a 2nd job that takes up anywhere from 4-20 or more hours a week beyond my 40-hour work week. This is time I must prepare for that might otherwise go into my SOM work (physically or emotionally). It's having this additional income that allows me to contribute to supplemental retirement beyond the pension and lightly save for future homeownership (though that becomes more distant every waking day).

It's discouraging and slightly embarrassing that to afford a reasonable lifestyle of the basics and hoping to not have roommates into my 40s that the only real viable option other than leaving SOM for a higher paying job is to work a second job a few days a week or more. Closing the pay gap and supporting LD 2121.

I truly hope you consider supporting this act so dignity can return to public sector work and we can get back to worrying less about financial stability and more about the Maine population that relies on our services.

Thank you,
Kyle Parks