

Testimony in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions

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

My name is Rita Pello. I am writing to you today on behalf of myself as a private citizen in Augusta. I appreciate your committees for taking the time to consider this testimony in support of LD 2121. I work as a Title 1 Coordinator for the Maine Department of Education so my testimony will focus on the department of education but can be related to other state agencies.

Before becoming a Title I coordinator for the state in early 2022, I worked at a remote job at an education non-profit. When leaving that job, I weighed whether to take a pay cut because I was excited at the opportunity to have a greater positive impact and reach within the state that I recently moved to and now proudly reside. I had the privilege of being able to take a pay cut in order to do this work. However for many folks and for good reasons, that is not a choice they can make. I am in support of this bill so that it could attract more qualified workers, and bring in new people to the state who are currently not attracted to state-level work because of these trade offs.

The unfortunate truth, especially in a sector like education, is that there are many highly qualified people who would rather be paid fairly in a remote non profit job than working for the state. I want to see that change. I want to see these qualified, dedicated, creative, and passionate people working at the state because it's at the state level that we provide widespread professional development, grant funding and innovation opportunities, attention and resources to underserved students, partnerships with communities, and guidance on law, fiscal compliance, and instructional best practices.

This study is especially important now because nearly half of the Maine DOE will retire within the next ten years. I dont think we can wait to update our compensation and classification system a moment longer, lest we lose the opportunity to have a strong workforce that propels us into the future.

When determining whether to support this bill, please consider the immense impact a strong, resourced, and highly qualified staff would have on the state of Maine. And for the DOE, in particular, this means a trickle down to better support and guidance to the districts, schools, educators, families, and students in this state. I urge legislators to support this bill in order to help the state of Maine and its citizens thrive.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. The state of Maine matters to me greatly.