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I work for the Maine DEP's Hazardous Waste Management Unit. We have one open position we're trying to fill in the unit. I started with the Department in the summer of 2022 and the position has been open since before that time. When I was hired we had one person in the process of leaving for a better paying industry job as well. We're currently in our third round of interviews in for this position as we had offered the position in each of the first two rounds to our top candidates, who declined the offer citing low pay as the issue. Because of the difficulty in hiring our unit has only had one representative in Portland (myself) who is primarily responsible for HW activity in all of Southern Maine. This lack of staff has meant we have a multi-year backlog of licenses to get to and we have not been able to meet annual EPA targets for compliance inspections in Maine. Because of low pay we're unable to perform our job as needed for the people of Maine.

Personally, I do not know if I can continue to work this job for my whole career. The cost of living in Portland is very high and the <50k starting wage for my position, which requires multiple years of experience or graduate education (I have a master's degree) is not enough. I love the work we do and it's very important we keep doing it. But positions outside of state government and/or in other states would pay me more and that's something I have to consider. I, like most of my coworkers, love the work we do and the people we work with. It is truly a shame how little material appreciation we get from the state when it comes to paying a wage that reflects our importance. I urge you to pass this bill as it will help show the state how large the pay gap is. Rises in pay would allow our state employees to live dignified lives and give us the ability to fill our open positions with smart and capable people who as of now, cannot live on this pay.