

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Eduard Chenette, and I am a senior environmental engineer at the Maine Drinking Water Program, under Maine CDC, which operates under DHHS. I work within the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. This State-operated program provides financial assistance to Maine public water systems, helping to ensure safe drinking water and providing essential public health protection. Some examples of the funding for drinking water infrastructure improvement projects are upgrading or replacing water system pipes, treatment plants, storage tanks, and water sources, which are available as low-interest loans and grants from our program. Most of the funding is federal as part of the 1996 amendment to the SDWA, while states match 20% of the Federal grant dollars. This means that every dollar invested by the State of Maine secures five Federal dollars.

I respectfully urge you to support LD 1265, sponsored by Rep. Dhalac and cosponsored by Sen. Tipping, Rep. Roeder, Rep. Beck, Rep. Macias, Rep. Salisbury, and Sen. Bennett.

I work as part of a tiny team of no more than ten employees that helps distribute approximately \$30-\$50 million annually to ensure clean water for every citizen of the State. All of our positions are funded primarily using federal funds and a revolving component of the mix of state and federal dollars. I previously worked for six years for a private company and took a pay cut moving to work for the state, but I was excited to embrace the Drinking Water Program's mission.

Recently (on March 10th), the Compensation and Classification Bargaining Team has reached an Agreement with the Maine Bureau of Human Resources to implement some of the findings of the State's September 30, 2024 (Market Pay Report). It included the adjustment of approximately 7% for the four environmental engineers I oversee. It did not, however, include the pay adjustment for my (Sr Environmental Engineer) and my supervisor's positions. That came as a surprise to me, and upon further investigation and consultation with my union representatives, I realized that the state refused to include the Senior Environmental Engineer adjustment in the final round of agreement between the union. According to my union representatives, they have made multiple attempts to include my classification in one way or another, but the State simply refused to budge due to salary compression.

While I commend the State for acknowledging the pay disparity between state employees and those in comparable roles in other public sectors, I am deeply concerned about the inequity created by the recent wage increases, particularly in relation to my position and the positions of my direct reports. The lack of funding and the impartial classification and compensation reports have resulted in a situation where my direct reports, some of whom have less than one year of experience, now earn only \$7,000 less than I do in my position, despite my almost 10 years of experience, my technical expertise, and the considerable leadership responsibilities that my role entails.

It's very frustrating that the state continues to only partially adjust some employees' pay using the Market Pay Report. LD 1265 would establish a reporting system that is more holistic, which

would give Maine a better look at all state government job classifications and our market pay rates. This would help Maine obtain better data as we work to fix our broken pay scales. Without these types of fixes, I fear the work we do for the public will continue to suffer from unfilled vacancies. While we manage the funding of \$30-\$50 million a year and provide clean water for every citizen of Maine, it's frankly embarrassing that we are understaffed, underpaid, and underappreciated.

On top of this, we have been dealing with the issues with the current administration stopping the funding flow, which has never happened before. For example, this past Friday, the Trump administration announced the budget for the 2026 FY, where they recommended cutting \$2.46 billion from the current \$2.76 billion funding level of the State Revolving Fund Program. That represents 90% cuts for the program. The administration seeks to eliminate the program, and it stated that the remaining \$305 million is intended for states to find "alternative funding sources for their water infrastructure."

This bill proposal, LD1744, and LD 1539 are a small step toward ensuring that our state employees deserve to be adequately treated. I urge you to support it and greatly appreciate the co-sponsorship of many legislative members.

I am happy to answer questions.
Thank you.

Eduard Chenette
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LD 1265

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