

The Maine Heritage Policy Center Testimony to Oppose LD 1965

“An Act To Set a Minimum Wage for School Support Staff”

Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Adam Crepeau. I serve as a policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to LD 1965.

The Maine Heritage Policy Center supports the decision to pay school support staff \$16 per hour as long as that decision is made at the local level. However, we are opposed to this legislation because it would create an unfunded mandate for school districts across the state. According to the Maine Department of Labor, the average substitute teacher in Maine currently earns \$12.78 per hour.¹ In 2017, the Bangor Public School Department posted a listing that offered custodians \$13.86 per hour, office secretaries \$13.53 per hour and food service employees \$10.11 per hour.²

While the recent increases to the minimum wage have undoubtedly and artificially shifted school support employees' wages upward since 2017, the cost to pay them a minimum of \$16 per hour will require more funding from either the state or local level, or will further stretch school budgets. This would be unacceptable, especially since the 2020-21 biennial budget appropriated \$360 million more to the Department of Education than the 2018-19 budget.³ If this is truly a priority, it should have been included in the massive spending spree outlined in LD 1001, the biennial budget.⁴

If this bill passes, school districts' budgets would likely be more thinly stretched than they are already. According to the Maine Department of Education, approximately 8.33 percent of statewide education funding was dedicated to student and staff support in the 2017-18 school year.⁵ Instead of mandating a new minimum wage for school support staff, we should encourage school districts to live within their means and make the tough decisions to balance taxpayer dollars with our students' education. This can and should be done.

Further, we're curious where the \$16 per hour figure originated — was there a specific calculation that led the sponsor to this number or was it something that was formulated in another manner? Either way, this decision should remain with the local school districts because they would be responsible for carrying out this mandate. For those reasons, The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote, “Ought Not to Pass” on this bill. Thank you.

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/oes1.html>

² <https://www.bangorschools.net/news/2017/07/07/consider-a-career-as-a-public-school-support-staff-member/>

³ http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/bills_128th/fiscalpdfs/FN039057.pdf;

http://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/bills_129th/fiscalpdfs/FN100104.pdf

⁴ http://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/bills_129th/fiscalpdfs/FN100104.pdf

⁵ https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov/doe/files/inline-files/FY18ResidentExpenditureBudgetCat_PercentTotal_20190124.pdf