

Testimony in Opposition to LD 898 “An Act To Provide for a Professional Wage and Support for New Educators”

Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Adam Crepeau and I serve as the policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity today to testify in opposition to LD 898.

The Maine Heritage Policy Center takes issue with several parts of LD 898. First, mandating that school districts pay their teachers a \$40,000 starting salary is beyond ambitious, especially without sufficient funding from the state after fiscal year 2022-2023. Also, this bill requires that teachers' salaries are increased two years after they begin in their profession, costing the state, and eventually local school districts, even more money.

According to Title 20-A, Chapter 505, Section 13406, the current minimum salary that a certified teacher can be paid is \$30,000. In addition to a \$10,000 (33 percent) increase, this bill incrementally decreases the state's share of funding for a \$40,000 minimum salary from 100 percent in fiscal year 2020-2021 to 66 percent in 2021-2022 and 33 percent in 2022-2023. Once state funding has diminished, the local school districts are left liable to fund this mandate. While Maine should better compensate exceptional teachers, this proposal leaves localities on the hook for maintaining this increase in pay. Municipalities, especially in rural school districts, are likely to raise property taxes in response to increases in their school budgets.

While this bill only accounts for an increase in starting salaries, teachers who have been in the profession for several years would inevitably need to receive a boost in pay in order for districts to remain competitive, further driving up costs. If local budgets are tight, a mandatory minimum salary might develop into wage freezes among more senior teachers in an effort to stabilize spending. Alternatively, school districts could be left in a situation where they have to decide what other programs to cut, or if they should increase property taxes to fund their school budgets.

In addition, the average starting salary for teachers was \$38,617 nationwide and \$36,845 in New Hampshire.¹ Increasing the starting salary for teachers to \$40,000 in Maine would disproportionately affect districts that already have difficulty funding their school budgets. If all school districts believed that their limited resources should be spent on paying teachers a minimum

¹ <http://www.nea.org/home/2016-2017-average-starting-teacher-salary.html>

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of \$40,000, they would have done so already. Ultimately, these decisions should be left to individual school districts, since they will eventually become the primary funder of this mandate.

For those reasons, The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote “Ought Not to Pass” on LD 898. Thank you.