

**The Maine Heritage Policy Center
Testimony to Oppose LD 900
“An Act To Expand the Rights of Public Employees
under the Maine Labor Laws”**

Senator Bellows, Representative Sylvester and distinguished members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Adam Crepeau and I am a policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to LD 900, “An Act To Expand the Rights of Public Employees under the Maine Labor Laws.”

I’m sure most can agree that public sector employees deserve to be paid well and be treated fairly. However, LD 900 seeks to allow public employees to strike, with exceptions for those whose duties concern protecting public safety. Allowing public employees to strike would set a dangerous precedent Maine. Employees’ rights in the public and private sector are fundamentally different, and for good reason. For example, public employees can mobilize to oust their leadership through elections if they are not being treated fairly whereas workers in the private sector do not always have that option.

In the private sector, individuals perform their duties for a business or organization so it can grow and prosper. In the public sector, individuals perform their duties solely for the public. Public sector employees need to be held to a different standard because they are employed to maintain the general welfare of Maine citizens. In contrast, private sector employees are employed to increase production and profits. The difference is stark and the laws governing labor relations should remain separate for that reason.

While this bill excludes public employees that serve to protect the public, this change could still be harmful to the public. For example, educators would be allowed to strike for an unspecified amount of time, allowing children to go without the education they deserve. Even worse, a strike by public employees could cripple essential services that are not categorized as public safety. This would undoubtedly disrupt our economy and normal operations in the jurisdictions in which these employees serve.

It’s also worth noting that public sector employees make an average of over \$7,000 more annually than private sector employees.¹ Thus, employees in the public sector must be faring

¹<https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/000001.htm#00-0000>; <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/999001.htm>

well without having the ability to strike in most states. In fact, only 15 states permitted public employees to strike in 2014 whereas 35 prohibited it.² Therefore, not only is allowing public employees to strike unpopular but it is inherently irresponsible.

Lastly, allowing public employees to strike would give them and their collective bargaining agents more leverage over public employers. If services that do not include the public safety are hindered long enough, the public and town officials would be more inclined to give in to demands, even if it means incurring debt. This might mean spending funds the town or city cannot afford to give the striking employees the demands they desire.

How far are we willing to go to allow public employees to be granted their wish-lists and at what cost?

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

²<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/los-angeles-teachers-are-strike-exercising-right-not-enjoyed-most-n958871>