

Testimony of Jeff McCabe  
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989

In Support of LD 233, "An Act to Ensure Efficiency in Petitions Reviewed by the Secretary of State by Clarifying Deadlines Related to Those Petitions"  
Sponsored by Representative Laura Supica

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,  
Monday, Feb. 6, 2023, State House Room 437, and Electronically

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, I'm Jeff McCabe, director of politics and legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. Maine Service Employees Association represents over 13,000 workers across the state, including workers for the Maine Department of the Secretary of State.

We're here in support of LD 233 because right now, short staffing in the Maine Department of Secretary of State has made it difficult for the workers there to keep up with the high workloads they've been experiencing. LD 233 would provide some relief by changing, from 30 days to 30 work days, the amount of time the Department has to determine the validity of a petition and issue its written decision.

While LD 233 would give workers in the Department a little more time to review petitions, we'd like to point out that this legislation at best provides a short-term solution to a long-term problem: For years, the State has understaffed quality public services in our Great State of Maine. The difficulty that the State of Maine has been experiencing in recruiting and retaining qualified workers throughout all departments in Maine State Government is well-documented.

Members of this committee may be aware that in 2020, The Segal Group Inc. performed a market pay study at the request of the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services per the collective bargaining agreements between MSEA-SEIU Local 1989 and the State of Maine. According to the findings of [the State of Maine Market Study Report](#) dated Nov. 20, 2020, state employees earn on average 15% less than what their peers make from other public employers in Maine and throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional pay differences. The findings confirm what a similar study found back in January of 2009.

The State Employee Pay Gap is unfair to State employees and their families and it harms the essential services the people of Maine rely on. While the State made improvements in its compensation in the last contract negotiations, including raising its minimum wage for State employees to \$15 per hour, a 6% general salary increase, and has made some classification-specific adjustments since, the other employers whom the State of Maine is competing with for workers have aggressively raised wages, further exacerbating the pay gap between the State of Maine and its competitors.

The problem of the State Employee Pay Gap is compounded by the historic inflationary pressure consumers are feeling in all aspects of our lives from groceries to housing to heating oil and gas prices. This income disparity, coupled with substantial cuts to State employees' pensions and healthcare under the previous administration, has eroded the attractiveness of public service as a career in Maine. This is not a problem just in one or two agencies – it is a problem throughout State government. While wages are not the only area in need of improvement, they are a necessary component of any solution to the recruitment and retention problem the State of Maine has been experiencing. Immediate action and progress are necessary to address this longstanding injustice.

Another way to approach the problem that LD 233 seeks to address is to fund the Secretary of State's budget requests, so that the Department has the funding and workers necessary to do the Department's work in a timely manner.

Thank you and I would be glad to answer any questions.