

Hello, my name is Heather Gilcrest and I am a year round secretary at Village Elementary School in York. I am here today to testify in support of LD955, LD974 and LD1237.

In my role as a full-time, year-round secretary I see daily how low wages directly affect the quality of life for support staff in our schools and how that in turn begins to affect the quality of care and education they then can provide to their students.

So many people enter this profession with the hope of making a difference in the lives of a child. What is so surprising to me is how quickly that joy and eagerness turns into sacrifice, in fact, when I started in this career, I had no idea just how deeply the level of sacrifice ran.

First, we realize that our income is not enough to support us, so we sacrifice a living wage because we still feel we are here to make a difference.

Then so many of us end up sacrificing our time having to get a second job just to make ends meet. That sacrifice is twofold if you have a family, not only are you sacrificing your time, but you are also sacrificing their time with you.

Next you sacrifice your sleep, because there isn't enough time in a day to work two jobs, take care of the family and their needs, and physically pay those bills that you are working so hard to cover.

After sleep comes your physical health, you start getting sick all the time. And after that, without even seeing it coming, you've sacrificed your mental health – this is when the burn out strikes. Mind you, it's been brewing since several sacrifices ago.

When you have support staff that are so overworked because we are so underpaid, how can it not affect our students? How can we possibly put our best face forward when we are so often exhausted, physically, and mentally?

How can we encourage these kids to keep on going, to keep giving it their best, when we no longer feel like that is possible for ourselves?

Is this really what we want for our kids?

We have an opportunity, here today, in this moment to choose to make a true difference in the lives of education support professionals across the State by supporting LD955, LD974 and LD1237.

Thank you for your time today and for your service to the people of this state.