

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

LD No. 522, Resolve, To Establish the Study Committee Regarding Teachers' Salaries

March 25, 2009

Representative Sutherland, Senator Alfond, Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Weston L. Bonney. I am testifying **in favor of Resolve 522, To Establish the Study Committee Regarding Teachers' Salaries**. I am a taxpayer citizen interested in the education of all Maine children and I am also representing the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education, a non-partisan advocate for all Maine children. I am a retired banker having served as the President of several banking organizations, two of which were in Maine with branch locations across the state. These organizations hired thousands of Maine workers. I also served for ten years as a member of the Maine State Board of Education.

How Maine compensates its teachers and how much they are paid is fundamental to the success of our education system. Having the right teachers in the right place at the right time is necessary if all students are to graduate from high school having mastered the Learning Results Standards that are currently required by law. I commend the introduction of this potentially important legislation that hopefully will result in compensating our current teachers fairly based on how well they perform and will be a factor in attracting more of our talented college graduates to the profession of teaching.

Recent policy changes have resulted in much needed improvement in the academic characteristics and backgrounds of those entering the profession. However despite progress, in 2008 Maine students aspiring to become teachers had average SAT scores in critical reading of 470 versus the national average for all students of 502 and in math only 455 versus 515. We owe our kids the best teachers possible and addressing compensation would be a significant step in attracting more talented teacher candidates.

I would like to suggest **several amendments** to the resolve that I believe will produce better results from the Commission's work.

1. The charge should be changed from "Teachers' Salaries" to "**Teachers' Total Compensation**". Salaries are an important component of compensation but the total package including fringe benefits is more important. Successful businesses and organizations know that the total compensation package is a significant factor in attracting the best employees. We need our most talented people doing the most important job of teaching our children. We know that the most significant single factor in determining a child's success in school is the quality and competency of his/her teacher.

2. The Commission Membership should be expanded to include people with significant compensation experience in the private sectors. I suggest three additional members be appointed representing organizations that hire and manage large numbers of people such as hospitals, banks, insurance companies, and manufacturers. These organizations will be competing with our school systems for the best employees. Many of these organizations have trained and experience compensation specialists. Compensation professionals would add significant value to the deliberations of the Commission and hopefully the resulting recommendations will provide more competitive compensation packages for our teachers.
3. A review of the collective bargaining process in the state should also be required with the goal of streamlining the process for the benefit of many. I recently served as Chair of the Education Sub-Committee of the Cumberland County Strategic Planning Group. The current status of collective bargaining in the county was reviewed in depth. It was clear that all students and administrators as well as teachers would be better served with fewer bargaining units. Incredible amounts of administrative and bargaining teachers' time as well as other resources are devoted to the process. Fewer and larger units could be a win/win situation for all. The current process should be reviewed from a statewide perspective.

While the suggested amendments are substantive I believe their addition would provide more comprehensive recommendations that would help improve the quality of teaching and learning in Maine. The focus of all education policies needs to be what is best for all Maine children.

I thank you for your attention and would be pleased to answer any questions.

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