

TESTIMONY OF JEFF MCCABE, DIRECTOR OF POLITICS & LEGISLATION, MSEA-SEIU LOCAL 1989
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TAXATION

In Support of LD 1677, An Act To Support Frontline Workers by Adding a Temporary Tax Bracket
Affecting High Earners, Sponsored by Speaker Fecteau

May 13, 2021, SH Room 127

Senator Chipman, Representative Terry, members of the Committee on Taxation, I'm Jeff McCabe, Director of Politics & Legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union (MSEA-SEIU Local 1989). Maine Service Employees Association is a labor union representing over 13,000 workers and retirees, mainly in the public sector, statewide.

We are here today in support of LD 1677, which would create the Frontline Worker Support Program to provide grants to frontline workers, including but not limited to health care workers, corrections officers, firefighters, law enforcement officers, grocery store workers, and workers in the educational sector, funded by a temporary, 2-year surcharge on the wealthiest Mainers. The irony and privilege of being able to testify on this bill remotely needs to be pointed out.

Throughout this last year, we have seen time and again just how essential our frontline workers are. They have kept us safe, cared for our loved ones when they've fallen ill, ensured we can feed our families, delivered our mail, and educated our children; and these are just a few of the myriad ways that frontline workers have been the backbone of our society in the last year. Not only this, but these workers have risked, and continue to risk, their health and their families' health simply by reporting for work each day. While some frontline workers have received hazard pay for the increased risk they face, many have not.

When the pandemic began in March 2020, many state employees were transitioned to work from home in order to mitigate the risk of catching COVID-19. However, there were also a number of jobs that required employees to continue reporting to work, often in public-facing jobs. Many of those employees were eligible for hazard pay throughout 2020, including Department of Corrections staff, Caseworkers, and employees in state hospitals, among others. On December 23, 2020, we received word that the various hazard pay agreements our members in state government had in place would terminate. Despite our state being in the depths of one of the largest COVID-19 surges of pandemic at the time. These employees deserve to be compensated for the additional risk they face while doing their jobs, which did not end on January 1, 2021 because federal funding ran out. Hazard Pay Agreements only covered a small portion of our members who continue to this day to be considered essential workers and risk getting sick. Other union siblings and essential workers have received praise and thanks but no additional compensation for their ongoing risk.

The Frontline Worker Support Program would help compensate frontline workers for the additional risk and danger that they have faced on the job for over a year now. Even before the pandemic began, many of these workers were underpaid, and their jobs have only gotten more challenging in the past year. Even with an influx of federal pandemic relief funds coming into our state, Maine needs ongoing, additional revenue to help address long-unmet needs. Pre-pandemic, too many Mainers were left

behind, and if we do not work to address those unmet needs now, we will continue to leave them behind in the future. I think it's safe to say that we have all felt gratitude towards our frontline workers in the last year; they have sacrificed so much to keep our great state healthy, safe, and functional. It's time that we show them the respect they deserve by ensuring that they are properly compensated for the additional risks they have faced. I urge you to please vote "ought to pass" on LD 1677. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.