

Maine Stater

Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union

VOL. LVIII, No. 1

February 16, 2023

USPS709700

Executive Branch contract bargaining — **Members name core demands**

Four core demands surfaced throughout the bargaining-priorities surveys completed by over 2,000 workers in the State of Maine Executive Branch. Our Negotiations Team is bringing these demands to the negotiations table:

- **Recruit and Retain Staff** — It's past time to close the pay gap, fix the broken classification system and address needs like training and orientation;
- **Work Life Balance** — Including addressing the need for time off, flexible work schedules, better access to the ability to work from home and improvements to leave time like bereavement;
- **Fairness and Equity** — Including access to promotions, fairness in applying work rules and



Workers at Maine DHHS in Winthrop are determined to secure a fair contract!

conditions, equitable access to training and support, and workplaces free from harassment, bullying and discrimination;

- **Healthy and Safe Work** — From the right staffing to do the job to workplaces safe and free from
- Please see **BARGAINING**, Back Page

Show your support for our core demands by signing our petition:
bit.ly/mseaCoreDemands

Then join your coworkers in your worksite's contract team supporting our Negotiations Team:

Join your worksite team by contacting MSEA-SEIU staffer Jonathan Brown:
622-3151 or
jonathan.brown@mseaseiu.org

Proposed 2023 State Budget —

Initial budget proposal encouraging; more work to do on it

We're encouraged by many of **Governor Mills'** proposed state budget initiatives impacting our members. The proposed budget continues free community college for another two years. It increases funding for both the Judicial Branch and Maine Maritime Academy. It reduces the state employee share of individual health

insurance premiums by establishing new premium tiers (story on Page 9); The proposed budget also adjusts the state employee health credit premium program to reflect those tiers.

In her remarks, the Governor said, "We must invest in the infrastructure that supports our greatest asset, which is our people." Since the proposed

budget counts on a qualified and experienced state workforce to provide services to all Maine people, we respectfully ask the Governor to dedicate the necessary funding to end the state employee pay gap as the 2020 State of Maine Market Study Report bit.ly/2020MarketStudyReport shows State of Maine workers are underpaid by 15% on average compared to their counterparts throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional differences. A report from 2009 showed similar results.

For retirees in the State-sponsored retirement plan who were eligible for a retiree cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in September 2022, the Legislature's Appropriations Committee has approved the administration's proposed one-time

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Our letter to Governor Mills sharing our priorities for the proposed state budget, **PP 6-7**

Speak up on proposed State Budget, **PP 8-9**

Retiree members push for full retiree cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), **PP 10-11**

payment equal to a 1 percent COLA for an average payment of \$175. While we appreciate this initiative, it's important to note Maine's retired state workers and teachers still haven't caught up from the 2011 pension cuts. As such, we encourage the Maine Legislature and the Governor to build upon this proposed one-time payment and fully fund a retiree COLA that matches inflation.

Maine's tax structure remains imbalanced; fix it!

We pay taxes for critical services that benefit all of us. Our public schools and colleges, roads and bridges, public safety, parks, clean water and the safety net protecting our children and seniors are just a few of the services we all count on. The revenues we raise through taxes ideally would provide the conditions for Maine communities to be places where we can all live, work, raise our families and, someday, retire with dignity in our own homes. This would be accomplished by ensuring that those who have benefited the most in this economy make tax contributions toward public investments that pay it forward for future generations of Maine workers, families and retirees.

But the reality is Maine's current tax structure is imbalanced as a direct result of the 2011 tax cuts that mostly benefited the wealthy. Proposals to further cut taxes would compromise Maine's capacity to uphold its commitments to Maine people and our communities now and in the future.

Cutting taxes now would create shortfalls in more challenging economic times – which are exactly when resources are needed the most to sustain vital programs for Maine people and communities and to ensure continued investment in our schools and communities.

It's also important to note those calling for tax cuts now never want to raise them in times of shortfalls to meet the needs of Maine people.

Instead of cutting taxes, the 131st Maine Legislature should keep Maine's financial house in order both in good times and bad, rather than put a match to it now.

Many of us are still struggling to dig out of the hole after the tax cuts in 2011 and the near destruction of State services. In fact, with the rising cost of living, many are falling further and further behind. Instead of cutting taxes, the members of the 131st Legislature should ensure that profitable corporations and the wealthy pay their share. They should ensure that expensive tax programs like the property tax freeze and others are reigned in and helping those who need it most. More disclosure is long overdue; disclosure would help complete the picture. We look forward to continuing to work with the Legislature and the administration on solutions to address these and other issues.



President's
Column –
Dean
Staffieri

Tell your story: Understaffing; ending the pay gap; additional funding for Maine Maritime; fully funding a retiree COLA

This edition of the *Stater* includes resources for all of us to persuade the 131st Legislature and the Mills administration to pass and enact into law a responsible state budget. Read our letter to Governor **Janet Mills** on Pages 6 and 7. Do your part by testifying in support of a responsible budget.

Members **Connor Smith**, who works for the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, and **Gary R. Brooks**, who works for the Maine Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management, address understaffing and low wages in their testimony on Page 8.

Member **Jake Adams** calls for more funding for Maine Maritime Academy on Page 12.

Retiree Member-Leaders **Ginette Rivard**, **Hal Booth**, **Steve Butterfield**, **Penny Whitney-Asdourian** and **Rob Peale** tell their stories on Pages 10 and 11 in support of fully funding a retiree cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).

Read all their stories. Then use our **2023 Guide to Writing Budget Testimony, Sharing Your Story** on Page 9 to tell your own story to state legislators in support of our issues.

Members speaking out in videos

Our videos in which members address understaffing, the State Employee Pay Gap and the need to fully fund a retiree COLA are getting attention online and helping us build support for our issues at the bargaining table and in the Legislature. Some of the stories on Facebook @mseaseiu1989 and our YouTube Channel (MSEA-SEIU Local 1989):

- **Brian Markey**, an assistant technician at Maine DOT. In his former position as a transportation worker, he once plowed continuously for 42-and-a-half hours straight, during the bomb cyclone of February 2017. He said, "You see double-vision, triple-vision, when you get that tired."
- **Brocke Robinson**, an emergency communications specialist for the Maine Department of Public Safety. Because of understaffing, "Instead of working eight- or 10-hour shifts, most of the time I'm working 14 or 16 hours, a lot of the times with eight hours off, and then we return to work another 14- or 16-hour shift," he said. "It can be exhausting....We need to step in now, and get the funding that we need now."
- Retiree members **Bob Ruhlin** and **Lois Baxter**. They talk about how the 2011 pension cuts have put retirees behind the cost of living and the importance of the Legislature addressing this problem.

What's your story? State legislators need to hear it!

Lillian's Corner

Greetings from your unapologetic heart thief, Lillian! My tail wagga meter was going full speed after the 2022 elections! You all came through and elected many friends that will represent all of our interests in the State House! Let's make sure we hold all of the folks in the Legislature accountable to their promises to make the lives of workers and puppies better. As I write to you amid a deep freeze, remember we are now bargaining our largest contracts and now is the time to get involved and demand the pay gap be closed, fix the broken classification system and improve the work-life balance that is crucial piece of a fulfilled life. We all deserve a safe and healthy workplace and to be treated fairly and with equity. I'll be making plenty of noise throughout the 2023 Executive Branch Bargaining and I want you to join me. Let's send a loud and clear message that management must honor the work we all do by providing the pay we deserve! I can't wait to see you all in the virtual world and perhaps in person now and then....please bring treats! Woof!



Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, CLC

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

Publication Title: Maine Stater
Publication Number: 70-9700
Filing Date: 12/19/2022
Issue Frequency: 5 times a year
Number of Issues Published Annually: 5
Annual Subscription Price: \$1.80
Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 65 State St., Augusta, ME 04330
Contact Person: Tom Farkas
Telephone: (207) 622-3151
Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters: 65 State St., Augusta, ME 04330
Publisher: Alec Maybarduk, 65 State St., Augusta, ME 04330
Editor: Tom Farkas, 65 State St., Augusta, ME 04330
Managing Editor: Alec Maybarduk, 65 State St., Augusta, ME 04330
Owner: Maine Service Employees Association, 65 State St., Augusta, ME 04330
Tax Status: Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months
Publication Title: Maine Stater
Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: October 1, 2021 - September 30, 2022
Total Number of Copies (Net press run): 7,597 (average each issue preceding 12 months; 8,462 (single issue nearest to filing date)
Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions: 7,597 (average each issue); 8,462 (single issue nearest)
Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions: 0 (average each issue); 0 (single issue nearest)
Total Paid Distribution: 7,597 (average each issue preceding 12 months); 8,462 (single issue nearest)
Free or Nominal Rate Outside County: 0 (average each issue); 0 (single issue nearest)
Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution: 0 (average each issue); 0 (single issue nearest)
Total Distribution: 7,597 (average each issue); 8,462 (single issue nearest)
Copies Not Distributed: 300 (average each issue); 300 (single issue nearest)
Total: 7,897 (average each issue); 8,762 (single issue nearest)
Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 100% (average each issue); 100% (single issue nearest)
Publication of Statement of Ownership: February 16, 2023

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Maine Stater

Published seven times a year by the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union, 5 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330. Periodical rate postage paid at Augusta, Maine.
ISSN: 1048-9037

Postmaster: Please send address corrections to the Maine Stater, 5 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330

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Meet our elected union leadership team

The MSEA-SEIU Board of Directors

Area 1

Jake Adams

A member of our Maine Maritime Academy Chapter, **Jake Adams** of Holden serves as a nonsupervisory steward in our Maine Maritime Academy Staff, Support and Professional Bargaining Unit. He works as a system support specialist for Maine Maritime Academy.

David Boudreau

The treasurer of our Penobscot Chapter, **David Boudreau** of Holden also serves as a non-supervisory steward in our Executive Branch Operations, Maintenance and Support Services Bargaining Unit. He works as a transportation worker II for the Maine Department of Transportation.

Jeff Doyon

The secretary and treasurer of our Central Maine Chapter, **Jeff Doyon** of Winslow has served on our resolutions, personnel and building needs committees. He works as an eligibility specialist for the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

Jacob Simmons

The president of our Maine Maritime Academy Chapter, **Jacob Simmons** of Castine works as an associate professor at Maine Maritime Academy.

Area 2

Mark Brunton

A member of our Capitol Western Chapter, **Mark Brunton** of China represents our union as a member of the Maine Public Employees Retirement System Board of Trustees. He works as a comprehensive health planner for the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

Melissa Damren

The president of our George Leadbetter Chapter, **Melissa Damren** of Winthrop serves as a child protective caseworker for the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

Mike Hein

A member of our Capitol Chapter, **Mike Hein** of Fairfield also has served on our membership benefits committee. He works as an office associate II for the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services.

Kris Segars

The vice president of our Motor Vehicle Chapter and a member of our labor-management committee in the Maine Department of the Secretary of State, **Kris Segars** of Oakland has served on our building needs committee and elections and credentials committee. He works as a customer representative associate II supervisor for the Maine Bureau of

Motor Vehicles within the Maine Department of the Secretary of State.

Area 3

Michael Lang

A member of our Southern Maine DOT Chapter, **Michael Lang** of New Gloucester works as a transportation crew leader for the Maine Department of Transportation.

Todd McArthur

A member of our Maine Turnpike Authority Chapter and grievance committee at the Maine Turnpike Authority, **Todd McArthur** of Farmingdale serves as a non-supervisory steward at the Maine Turnpike Authority. He works as a customer service representative for E-ZPass for the Maine Turnpike Authority.

Robyn Saucier

A member and vice president of our Judicial Employees Chapter, **Robyn Saucier** of Greenwood also serves as a Chief Steward. She works as a Court Technology Trainer for the Judicial Branch.

Brian Tuttle

A member and president of our Cumberland Chapter, **Brian Tuttle** of Pownal also serves as a nonsupervisory steward. He works as a Driver License Examiner for the Maine Department of Secretary of State.

Retirees

Steve Butterfield

The president of our Area 2 Retirees Chapter, **Steve Butterfield** serves on our Retirees Steering and Annual Meeting committees. Steve has been around our union most of his life. He retired as our union's staff director of information services; long before that, his father was a board director, vice president and president of our union.

Bob Ruhlin

A retired state transportation worker with almost 39 years of service with the Maine Department of Transportation, **Bob Ruhlin** of Kenduskeag has served in many union capacities over the decades, both as a working and retiree member. The president of our Eastern Maine Retirees Chapter, he serves on our constitution and bylaws, retirees steering and personnel committees. For all of us advocacy, he received our 2018 MSEA-SEIU Lifetime Achievement Award.

Robyn Egan

The vice president of our Androscoggin Valley Retirees Chapter, **Robyn Egan** of Windham retired after a career of service with the Maine Department of Corrections.

MSEA-SEIU Officers

Dean Staffieri, President

MSEA-SEIU President Dean Staffieri of Naples also serves on the SEIU International Executive Board. A member of our Eichel-Crinion Chapter, Dean also has served on our executive, personnel, building needs and policy review committees. He works as a rehabilitation counselor II for the Maine Department of Labor. Before that, he worked as a child protective services caseworker supervisor for the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.



Dean Staffieri

Cal Paquet, Vice President

A chief steward, MSEA-SEIU Vice President Cal Paquet of Bowdoin also has served on our Board of Directors, bargaining teams, grievance committees and executive committee. He works as the E-ZPass Fulfillment & Print Room Coordinator for the Maine Turnpike Authority.



Cal Paquet

Mark Landry, Treasurer

A member of our Capitol Chapter, MSEA-SEIU Treasurer Mark Landry of Augusta also has served on our Finance Committee and Building Needs Committee. He works as a management analyst II for the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services.



Mark Landry

Lisa Morgan, MSEA-SEIU Secretary

A chief steward and member of our Judicial Employees Chapter, MSEA-SEIU Secretary Lisa Morgan of Gorham also has served on our Board of Directors, bargaining team and policy review committee. She works as an administrative secretary for the State of Maine Judicial Branch.



Lisa Morgan

mseaseiu.org

...our new
and improved website!

MSEA-SEIU Representational Services Roundup

City of Auburn

Members of our City of Auburn bargaining unit are completing their bargaining surveys in anticipation of contract bargaining this spring.

Bates College

Workers at Bates College launched their organizing drive in Oct 2021 and voted for their union in January 2022. As part of an expensive and vicious anti-union campaign, the college has been stalling the by tying up the vote with legal objections. We're waiting for the National Labor Board to decide the case and allow us to proceed to count the votes.

Executive Branch Compensation, Classification Study

We're asking that the Mills administration and the 131st Maine Legislature work to support and fund the ongoing comprehensive classification study. This long-overdue initiative has made substantial progress in recent years, despite the pandemic, high turnover at the Bureau of Human Resources, the departure of the outside contractor, Segal, upon the expiration of its contract, as well as the sheer scope of the project. We believe it is critical that we work together with both the administration and the Legislature to find a way to complete the classification study and implement its recommendations. We believe doing so requires additional capacity and funding of the outside contractor to help complete the study, synthesize the results of the classification and compensation study committee's work and put forward a comprehensive recommendation that we can work with both the administration and Legislature to negotiate, approve, fund and implement. We're asking that the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services fund and extend Segal's contract so completion and implementation can advance as soon as possible.

For an update on Executive Branch bargaining, see the story on Page 1.

Judicial Branch of Maine State Government

After reviewing responses to their bargaining priorities survey, members of the Judicial Branch Bargaining Team are working on their priorities and bargaining proposals for the upcoming contract negotiations. The Bargaining Team members are:

- Administrative Unit: **Sue DeGroot**, Team Captain, **John Mannino**, **Rhonda Ouellette**, **Stephanie Molaver**, and **Shannon Casman**, Alternate;
- Professional Unit: **Robyn Saucier**, Team Captain, **Markayla Morris**, **Christen Haskell**, **Curt Lefebvre**, **Lisa Lamothe**, Alternate, and **Kevin Fogg**, Alternate
- Supervisory Unit: **Andy Frechette**, Team Captain, and **Ronda Nelson**.

City of Lewiston

Members of our City of Lewiston bargaining unit are completing their bargaining surveys in anticipation of contract bargaining this spring.

Lewiston Schools

We're working on a bargaining-priorities survey



MSEA-SEIU members at Maine DHHS Wilton are determined to fight for fair contract that addresses understaffing and ends the State Employee Pay Gap.



MSEA-SEIU Member Brocke Robinson, an emergency communications specialist for the Maine Department of Public Safety, is featured in one of our videos about understaffing throughout Maine State Government and the State Employee Pay Gap. See Brocke and other members tell their stories in the videos on our Facebook page: @mseaseiu1989.

that will go out to all members of the Lewiston Schools bargaining unit. Their current contract expires June 30.

Maine Community College System Adjunct Faculty

Member of our Adjunct Faculty bargaining team are in negotiations with management for a new contract to replace the one that expired Dec. 30, 2022. Four negotiation sessions have been held so far.

"As we sit down to negotiate over our future contract, we are eager to work together with you to raise the voices of all adjunct faculty teaching at community colleges throughout the state," the bargaining team wrote in a recent note to all Adjunct Faculty workers. "As your colleagues, we appreciate

Support LD 233 providing more time for petition reviews

On Feb. 6, we testified in support of legislation known as LD 233, sponsored by Representative **Laura Supica**, 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, 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. According to the **State of Maine Market Study Report** dated Nov. 20, 2020, state employees earn on average 15% less than what their peers make doing similar work in Maine and throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional pay differences. Immediate action and progress are necessary to address this longstanding injustice.

working together to provide education to the people of Maine. Your work means so much to the students and communities where we teach."

Members of the Adjunct Faculty bargaining team are **Chris Anderson**, **Dan Ford**, **Rosemarie DeAngelis**, **Andrea LaFlamme**, **Mark Read**, **Katrina Ray-Saulis** and **Camilla Lofving**.

SASSMM (Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine)

Members of our bargaining team at SASSMM are bargaining their first contract with the agency. Key issues include wages, remote work and health insurance.

Our new address — and new website!



We've officially moved our MSEA-SEIU Local 1989 headquarters into new, modernized and fully accessible office space to meet our needs for the 21st century! We're now located on the third floor of 5 Community Drive, Augusta. It's the brick office complex directly in front of the Augusta Civic Center; take the elevator at the inner-corner entrance.

Our new address: MSEA-SEIU Local 1989, 5 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330

Same phone: 207-622-3151

Same fax: Finance, 623-4916; General, 669-8319; Income Protection, 621-1475; and Representational Services, 621-1474

Same email: General email, mseaseiu@mseaseiu.org; Representational Services, representation@mseaseiu.org



Our new website at www.mseaseiu.org is online for the latest news and developments, including action alerts and our events calendar. On our website, you can read or download our contracts, find your union stewards as well as our elected union leaders and Board of Directors. You can become an MSEA-SEIU member, whether working or retired, and join our political action program, PASER (Political Action by Service Employees and Retirees). Under the Resources section are union forms such as our scholarship applications and our Income Protection information and applications.

Rest in Power, Ben Conant, Ted Rippy and Brett Hoskins



MSEA-SEIU Retirees Steering Committee Member Ben Conant, the recipient of our 2022 MSEA-SEIU Lifetime Achievement Award, died Nov. 22, 2022. A longtime leader in our union who organized our retirees' raffle at Annual Meeting, Ben worked nearly 50 years in law enforcement for the State of Maine and Oxford County.



Ted Rippy, a fierce advocate for home-care services for all Maine people, died in December 2022. He was a leader in our Local 771 Chapter (named for the starting hourly wage of \$7.71 for personal assistants at the time of the chapter's founding) from 2010 to 2012 and a longtime board member at Food AND Medicine.



Retiree Member Brett Hoskins worked for over 20 years for MainePERS and previously represented us as Labor Co-Chair of the State Employee Health Commission. He advocated for quality, affordable healthcare and prescription coverage for participants in the State Employee Health Plan. He died Jan. 20, 2023.

New MSEA-SEIU policy ensures open communication, exchange of ideas

In December of 2022, members of the MSEA-SEIU Board of Directors approved the following membership policy relating to the audio or video recording or live-streaming of any non-public events sponsored or hosted by MSEA-SEIU and related organizations:

Policy: Prohibition on Unauthorized Recordings or Live-Streaming

In order to encourage open communication, free exchange of ideas, an atmosphere of trust, and to protect the privacy interests of MSEA members and

guests, MSEA-SEIU Local 1989 hereby prohibits the unauthorized audio or video recording or live-streaming of any non-public events sponsored or hosted by MSEA and related organizations, including but not limited to MSEA Board meetings, the MSEA Annual Meeting, Committee meetings, Chapter Meetings, bargaining team meetings and bargaining sessions, grievance committee meetings, VEBA Board meetings, and PASER events. Additionally, in the event that an MSEA member attends another organization's events as

an official representative or delegate of MSEA, the unauthorized audio or video recording or live-streaming of such events is prohibited. Questions regarding the implementation of this policy should be directed to the President or Executive Director. Violation of this policy may result in corrective action, including but not limited to discipline, removal from MSEA events, and barring participation in future events.

Adopted: December 13, 2022

Dear Governor Mills —

Advance these shared goals

Dec. 19, 2022

Dear Governor Mills,

On behalf of the members of MSEA-SEIU Local 1989, congratulations on your reelection as Governor. We look forward to advancing our shared goals of rebuilding State Government, adequately staffing state agencies, strengthening retirement security for Maine's seniors and increasing working families' wages. The forthcoming Supplemental Budget, the Biennial Budget and the Executive Branch contract negotiations offer a unique opportunity to advance these shared goals.

As you build these budgets, we respectfully request your administration include the following investments:

- Include sufficient resources necessary in the biennial budget to fully eliminate the State Employee Pay Gap;
- Include sufficient funding necessary in the next supplemental budget to complete the classification study in 2023;
- Fully fund a retiree cost of living adjustment (COLA) that matches inflation for MainePERS participants;
- Increase funding for Maine Maritime Academy.

Addressing the State Employee Pay Gap

The State Employee Pay Gap: In January 2009, in response to a request by the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS), Crescendo Consulting Group, LLC, produced a labor market survey comparing Executive Branch employees to private sector and other public sector employees employed by 250+ companies and 100+ municipalities. The results were striking. On average, Executive Branch employees were paid between 7.5% and 21.7% less than comparable private sector workers. Specifically, on average, administrative employees were paid 7.5% less, operations and maintenance employees were paid 21.6% less, professional and technical employees were paid 21.7% less and supervisors were paid 9.6% less than comparable private sector workers.

In 2020, The Segal Group Inc. performed yet another pay study at the request of DAFS per the collective bargaining agreements between MSEA-SEIU Local 1989 and the State of Maine. According to the market pay study commissioned by DAFS, 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. This pay gap is unfair to State employees and their families and it harms the essential services the people of Maine rely on. In addition to using aggregated data on private sector compensation, Segal also compared State of Maine wages to public employers, including: the cities of Augusta, Bangor, Portland and South Portland; Cumberland County; four other New England states:



MSEA-SEIU Member and Maine Maritime Academy Associate Professor Jake Simmons, MSEA-SEIU Member and Maine Maritime Academy Support Specialist Jake Adams, Speaker Talbot Ross and Maine Maritime Academy President Jerry Paul, all from left, share a moment after discussing the need to increase State funding for Maine Maritime Academy.

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. The impacts are felt at the worksites, at the kitchen tables where families are deciding what to go without, and in the services the people of Maine rely upon.

Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont; and the U.S. Government in Maine. This study confirms the findings of the labor-market survey the State commissioned back in 2009. For many State workers, it's worse – accountants are underpaid by 20 to 33%; chemists, 24%; civil

engineers, 20 to 25%; maintenance mechanics, 31%; correctional officers, 16%; and correctional captains, 26%, according to the 2020 report

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. The impacts are felt at the worksites, at the kitchen tables where families are deciding what to go without, and in the services the people of Maine rely upon. The Maine State Ferry Service has struggled to provide consistent transportation to Maine islands, 911 dispatch services are critically understaffed and over-reliant on forced overtime, plow drivers work for durations that could compromise road safety, and reviews of development projects are backlogged at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. These concerns have not only been

Please see DEAR GOVERNOR MILLS, Page 7

DEAR GOVERNOR MILLS, ADVANCE THESE SHARED GOALS

Continued from Page 6

raised by our members, but also by commissioners, confidential staff, nonprofit service providers and advocacy groups. This is not a problem just in one or two agencies – it is a problem throughout State government.

Years of political, economic and social instability have prevented progress on the Pay Gap, but it's clear – now is the time to solve it. The fiscal forecasting committee predicts a \$282.8 million increase in revenue for the current biennium and \$488.6 million surplus for Fiscal Years 2024-2025. While there also are many other pressing needs, all will require the infrastructure of a healthy, sufficiently staffed, motivated, career-oriented, specialized and resilient workforce to support or implement their initiatives. While wages are not the only area in need of improvement to secure that future, they are a necessary component of any solution.

Classification Study: Also per the 2019-2021 and 2021-2023 MSEA-SEIU Local 1989 contracts, the State has begun a comprehensive classification study. This long-overdue initiative has made substantial progress, yet three years later, the committee still has a lot of work to do before completion. While the delays due to turnover in Human Resources, the expiration of Segal's contract, the pandemic and the substantial changes that need to be made are understandable, it is critical that we find a way to complete the study and recommendations this year. We believe this requires additional capacity and funding to extend Segal's contract to help complete the study, synthesize the results of the committee's work and put forward a comprehensive recommendation that we can work together to negotiate, approve, fund and implement. We ask that DAFS extend Segal's contract for up to two years and include the funding needed in the supplemental budget so this work can advance as soon as possible.

Strengthening Retirement Security for Maine Seniors

Members of our union deeply appreciate the actions your administration and the 130th Maine Legislature took to begin addressing the 2011 pension cuts imposed on State employees and public school teachers. Raising the 2021 retiree pension COLA and increasing the pension base helped soften the financial harm they endured – and the direct tax relief you signed into law for all Maine seniors also helped our members. Additional action to further strengthen retirement security by increasing the retiree COLA beyond the current 3% maximum is needed, however. Inflation this past September reached 9.1% – over 3 times the amount of the last retiree COLA. Retired State employees and teachers still haven't recovered financially from the 2011 pension cuts; over a decade later, they're still behind the cost of living and many continue to struggle to make ends meet.

We look forward to working with your administration and the 131st Maine Legislature on initiatives to ensure that all workers who have



MSEA-SEIU Director and Executive Branch Negotiations Team Member Dave Boudreau talks with NewsCenter WCSH6 on Feb. 8 about understaffing at MaineDOT and the need to end the State Employee Pay Gap. Dave works as a transportation worker II for Maine DOT. The State of Maine Market Study Report (read it at legislature.maine.gov/doc/5615) in 2020 compared the wages of State workers to their public and private sector counterparts throughout New England. The findings confirm what we've been telling the public and lawmakers for years and what a similar study found back in January of 2009: The State continues to substantially underpay Dave and his coworkers throughout State government for the work they do. See the story: bit.ly/NewsCenterMSEA

dedicated their careers to public service in our Great State of Maine can retire with dignity and that everyone impacted by the 2011 pension cuts is finally made whole.

Securing the Future of Maine's Seafaring Industries and Maine Maritime Academy

MSEA is also the bargaining agent for faculty and staff at Maine Maritime Academy (MMA) in Castine; we encourage you to make a greater investment in Maine Maritime Academy. As Maine's only public

college focusing on maritime training, and with a top-notch faculty and staff, MMA is the bedrock of Maine's maritime industry. Most MMA students are Mainers, and the strong salaries they earn after graduating are a boon to families and communities across the state. However, MMA is in tough shape financially. Currently, public funding for MMA as a percentage of its overall revenue lags far behind

Additional action to further strengthen retirement security by increasing the retiree COLA beyond the current 3% maximum is needed, however. Inflation this past September reached 9.1% – over 3 times the amount of the last retiree COLA. Retired State employees and teachers still haven't recovered financially from the 2011 pension cuts; over a decade later, they're still behind the cost of living and many continue to struggle to make ends meet.

that of other public institutions, including Maine's Community College and University Systems, as well as other maritime colleges across the country, such as Massachusetts Maritime Academy. By increasing its investment in MMA, the State would help alleviate their financial constraints, reduce the tuition costs for students and enable MMA to provide competitive wages for all MMA workers.

Congratulations, again, on your reelection.

We look forward to continuing to work

with you, your administration and the 131st Maine Legislature on solutions to address these critical issues and any others central to the lives of Maine's public service workers, active and retired, and to the people of Maine who count on quality public services.

Sincerely, Dean Staffieri, President, and the Members of the MSEA-SEIU Board of Directors

“As things currently stand, State employment is not an avenue to the middle class, but a sentence to live paycheck to paycheck.”

—Connor Smith, MSEA-SEIU member

131st Maine Legislature —

Invest in services; end the pay gap!

By Connor Smith

MSEA-SEIU Capitol Chapter Member

On Feb. 8, Connor testified before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and the Taxation Committee:

My name is Connor Smith, I am a procurement analyst II for the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, the state department responsible for overseeing every purchase made by State of Maine Agencies.

I am here to today to discuss the importance of increased funding to both our agencies and our workforce. Staffing shortages are going to become an increasing problem over the coming years, and significant funding is the only way to combat the issue. An aging workforce is going to see a substantial increase in vacancies



Connor Smith

— vacancies that will not be filled at the current pay rates. My department alone is seeing two retirements within the next six months. These retirees are public servants who have taken on significantly more work than their roles would normally require, because 30 years of experience provides expertise that cannot be taught over night to new hires.

The cost of living, especially rental prices, have skyrocketed throughout the state of Maine over the last few years. One-bedroom apartments under \$1,500 a month are few and far between, and rarely in places people want to live let alone start a family. To be frank, I am only able to work for the State because my education was paid for through military service.

The current pay gap has become so extreme that there will be no hiring college graduates struggling with student loans on top of the increased price of living. The phrase “do more with less” will not fill positions or allow workers to keep up with demands as people leave for well-deserved retirements.

Turnaround times within my department are

State should pay a share of Medicare Part B premiums

We testified Feb. 9 before the Legislature’s Labor and Housing Committee in support of LD 111, “An Act Requiring the State to Pay a Share of a Retired State Employee’s or Retired Teacher’s Premium for Medicare Part B Under Medicare Advantage,” sponsored by Rep. **Dan Shagoury**. Excerpt:

We have come before the Legislature and the Labor and Housing Committee numerous times to ask them to support state and teacher retirees who have been hurt by actions of the Legislature over the years. Current retirement benefits are hurting recruitment and retention efforts. To say retirees have had it rough is an understatement. In simple



On Feb. 10, MSEA-SEIU President Dean Staffieri told the Legislature’s Appropriations and Labor and Housing committees about the impact of the State of Maine consistently underfunding and understaffing the services Maine people count on. The State continues to underpay State workers by at least 15% on average. “As you craft this budget, please take to heart the Governor’s words from Jan. 10: ‘Our greatest asset....is our people,’” he said.

expected to be within five days for RFPs, RFAs, or selection packages – something we feel is necessary to keep our government functioning. It is difficult to see how our department, or any department, can continue to provide timely service when our workforce continues to downsize and positions cannot be filled by qualified workers do to the pay gap. Raises that fail to meet interest rates are not raises, but pay cuts. As things currently stand, State employment is not an avenue to the middle class, but a sentence to live paycheck to paycheck.

Recruitment and retention need to be the primary focus of the State if they intend to continue functioning while dealing with the retirement of one of the oldest work forces in the nation.

I appreciate your time and consideration and hope that the wellbeing of those who have dedicated their lives to State service will remain a priority for you all.

terms they have had the rug pulled out from under them many times by the Legislature, and have watched as the retirement benefits they planned on have been frozen and slashed. Many involved in the pension cuts of 2011 recognized they went too far. We encourage the committee to establish that the State will up hold its agreement with retirees to provide the same level of insurance coverage as when they are active. It also is important to note the focus of the bill’s sponsor: “It is also my intent that this bill only applies to those retirees who have qualified for 100% coverage of their insurance through the state retirement system.”

‘We cannot live on \$17.54 an hour!’

By Gary R. Brooks of Dedham
MSEA-SEIU Penobscot Chapter Member

On Feb. 8, Gary testified before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,, and the Criminal Justice and Public Safety, Committee:

I work as a Building Custodian for the Maine Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management. I’m here today to tell you that State of Maine workers have been underpaid for years and it’s past time our wages are raised so 1) we can catch up with the rising cost of living and 2) so we are paid fairly compared to everyone else doing similar work throughout New England.

I have 20 years of experience as a custodian. Three other custodians and I clean 20 buildings daily. We cannot live on \$17.54 an hour! The four of us are really hurting. We like our jobs and aren’t going anywhere, but our pay cannot stay flat while everything around us skyrockets out of sight. I should not have to find another job to survive. When I told my State Representative, **Micky Carmichael**, about our low pay, he asked me: Why is the pay so low and how are you living on half-pay?

Everybody knows we’ve been falling further and further behind, but the State still hasn’t done enough about it. The State two years ago, in 2020, released a report showing State workers are on average paid 15 percent less than their public and private sector counterparts throughout New England. If you haven’t read that report, I think you should read it. It’s online at (<https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/5615>).

As a Building Custodian, my paycheck is eaten up the cost of living and circumstances beyond my control. We need higher wages. My power bill as a single person has gone up a lot because the PUC raised my kilowatt rate. With a \$820 monthly house payment there’s not much left for everything else, so we custodians at the Guard base, all of us workers, every one of us, need higher wages.

Right now the State has a budget surplus, so I’m asking you to fund a State budget that ends the State Employee Pay Gap. You should also know it’s the low wages for State workers that is making it hard for the State to recruit and retain workers. Funding a State budget that ends the State Employee Pay Gap will go a long way toward making sure the services are there that Maine people count on every day. Thank you.

131st Maine Legislature —

Join us March 30: Labor Lobby Day

After a two-year hiatus during the pandemic, we're returning to an in-person **Maine AFL-CIO Labor Lobby Day** on Thursday, March 30, at the State House. Attend to lobby your state senator and state representative in support of legislation improving rights, protections and economic security for working people.

To register, go to bit.ly/2023LaborLobbyDay or you can contact **Adam** at 207-991-7000 or adam@maineaflcio.org

Labor Lobby Day is a great experience for new and experienced union members alike to advocate for all of us on our own time. For many members, the first time coming to the State House for Lobby Day has transformed their leadership and inspired them to get more involved in the life of our union and in the legislative advocacy process.

What: 2023 Maine AFL-CIO Labor Lobby Day

When: Thursday, March 30th, 7:45am - 3pm

Where: Maine State House, Augusta

Labor Lobby Day starts with a training in the Cross Cafe adjacent to the State House in the morning, and then we go upstairs to lobby legislators in teams.

Strengthening the State Employee Health Plan

We're encouraged that Governor Mills' proposed State Budget include **an initiative reducing the state employee share of individual health insurance premiums by establishing new premium tiers**; starting July 1, 2023, the State would pay:

- 95% for those earning \$50,000 or less
- 90% for those earning over \$50,000 but less than \$100,000
- 85% for those earning \$100,000 or more

The proposed budget also adjusts the current health premium credit program to reflect the above premium tiers.

For comparison, the State currently pays as follows toward individual health insurance premiums:

- 95% for those earning \$30,000 or less
- 90% for those earning over \$30,000 but less than \$80,000
- 85% for those earning \$80,000 or more

Given current premium rates, employees earning between \$30,000 and \$50,000 would have the opportunity with the 5% health premium credit to save almost \$647 per year. That amount is greater than the current individual deductible of \$600 per calendar year, and that savings will only increase as health care premiums continue to rise.

Our 2023 Guide to Writing Budget Testimony, Sharing Your Story

Key Points:

- Testify on your own personal time, using your own personal devices. Don't testify at work or use work devices!
- Personal stories are best!
- Key messages: pick one or two – they don't need to be long, just a sentence or two.
- Story: Tell a story that illustrates your main point.
- Closing: Reinforce your key message (again, just a sentence) and thank the committee.
- If you need help with writing and preparing your testimony, reach out to **Beth White** at beth.white@mseaseiu.org

Questions to Prompt Your Writing for Testimony on the Proposed State Budget:

You don't need to answer all questions – they're meant to help with brainstorming for your testimony!

- If you had a magic wand and could fix three things in your department or work site, what would they be?
- What would it mean for you, your coworkers and the folks you serve if your department was fully funded and fully staffed? What might that look like?
- If your department had more funding, what would you change for yourself and your coworkers? What would you change for the Mainers whom you serve or the services your department provides?
- What's one thing that you've wanted to fix/change/address for a long time, but haven't been able to due to lack of funding/resources?
- How would increased funding help you and your coworkers do your jobs better?
- How would increased funding for your department or worksite make Maine a better place?
- What resources do you and your coworkers need to be the most successful in your jobs?

The Basics of a Public Hearing:

You must register at least 30 minutes before the hearing if you'd like to testify live on Zoom! You'll want to prepare your testimony before the hearing and submit it online ahead of the hearing if possible. Beth can help with submitting testimony or signing up for hearings – but please reach out right away! Keep reading for do-it-yourself info.

If you plan to testify in person, you do not need to register in advance. Simply add your name to the list of people wishing to speak when you get to the hearing. You do not need to submit your written testimony online if you plan to speak in person!

You will have three minutes to speak, and the time goes by fast! Typically, one page of single-spaced testimony will fill this time. If you feel like you can't say everything in three minutes, you can always submit longer written testimony. Some folks find it helpful to practice their testimony a few

times before the hearing.

Put things into your own words – the most important thing you can do is to share why you personally support/oppose the bill. Sharing your own experiences and stories is powerful and legislators need to hear them!

You can testify on the budget electronically or submit your written testimony electronically:

To submit written testimony electronically or to sign up to testify over Zoom, go to www.mainelegislature.org/testimony/ and then follow these directions: At the link click Public Hearing; select Appropriations Committee; then select LD 258; then select the date you plan to testify; then upload a PDF of your testimony or copy/paste the text of your testimony into the box. Be sure to fill in all required info, including whether you plan to testify over Zoom.

For Those Testifying In Person or Via Zoom, Once the Hearing Begins:

The hearing will begin with testimony from the legislators who are sponsoring the bill. Next, members of the public will get to speak. Generally, the testimony is ordered by those supporting the bill, those against it, then those who are neutral but wish to offer information. You can only speak for three minutes, but your written testimony can be longer.

Direct your comments to the committee, not the audience. Sometimes, legislators will be coming and going from the Zoom if they have to attend other hearings or work sessions. Don't be alarmed if someone leaves during your testimony - they'll get a copy of the written version!

When it's your turn...

You will hear the clerk announce your name and move you from "attendee" to "participant" of the Zoom. Turn on your video, unmute, and introduce yourself to the Committee Chairs & Members like this: "Senator _____, Representative _____, and members of the Committee on _____, my name is _____. I am here on my own time to speak in support of LD ____, An Act to _____." Read your testimony! You may get a gentle reminder when three minutes is up.

You can conclude your testimony by politely asking the Committee to either support/oppose the bill.

After you're finished, members of the committee might have questions for you. It's always okay to say you don't know the answer to a question!

Need Help?

Reach out to MSEA-SEIU Lead Political and Legislative Coordinator **Beth White** at beth.white@mseaseiu.org or 207-624-0628. She can help with drafting/proofreading testimony, signing up for hearings and answering questions.

“It’s been 12 years since that break in faith. I’m hoping that this time, with a nice budget surplus, this Legislature will finally undo that unfair action taken in 2011, restore the COLA to its provisions prior to 2011, and make the retirees damaged by that 2011 action whole.”

—Hal Booth, MSEA-SEIU retiree member

\$175 ad-hoc COLA for eligible State retirees gains support

There is more work to be done: Fully fund a retiree COLA that matches inflation

As part of its work on the proposed Supplemental Budget, the Maine Legislature’s Appropriations Committee has approved the administration’s proposal for a \$175 payment as a so-called ad-hoc retiree cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for eligible participants in the State-sponsored retirement plan of the Maine Public Employees Retirement System (MainePERS). This payment would be for those State/Teacher retirees who were eligible for a retiree COLA in September 2022. Additional votes were being scheduled in the Legislature at press time.

At a hearing Jan. 6, MSEA-SEIU retiree members spoke noted more must be done for retirees harmed by the 2011 pension cuts.

“Last Legislative session I, along with my union brothers and sisters, urged this committee to restore the retiree COLA to pre-2011 cuts,” MSEA-SEIU past president **Ginette Rivard**, chair of our Retirees Steering Committee and president of our Aroostook County Retirees Chapter, told the Appropriations Committee. “We all knew that 3% was not going to be anywhere near the rate of inflation in just a few months. At that time I did say I would probably be back this year.”

“I am grateful for the Governor’s action on this,” Ginette added. “I wholeheartedly support the additional 1% ad hoc COLA. It shows that she recognizes the impact this reduced COLA is having on retired public servants. An additional 1% at this time will help bridge some of the gap for current retirees. It may mean being able to buy a few more groceries, get a prescription refilled or actually fill the gas tank. However, this one-time COLA does not go far enough. It does nothing to address the inequity that was created by the 2011 cuts to current and future retirees. In order to fix this long-term problem, I urge you to address a more permanent solution in the next biennial budget. And I probably will see you again when the time comes as I will continue to advocate on behalf of myself and my fellow retired public servants.”

MSEA-SEIU Area 2 Retirees Chapter Member **Hal Booth** said the 2011 pension cuts have been devastating to retirees and now is the time for the Legislature to make retirees whole.

“When I was preparing for retirement, I did careful calculations to see whether I could live on my state retirement plus my other source of income - I own a two-family house and rent out an apartment,” Hal told the Appropriations Committee. “Part of those calculations involved of relying on the contractual COLA to help me keep up with inflation.



MSEA-SEIU Area 2 Retirees Chapter Member Hal Booth calls on the Maine Legislature’s Appropriations and Labor and Housing committees to undo the pension cuts of 2011.



MSEA-SEIU past president Ginette Rivard, chair of our Retirees Steering Committee and president of our Aroostook County Retirees Chapter, asks the Legislature to find a more permanent solution to the 2011 pension cuts that have left retired state workers and retired teachers falling behind the cost of living.

Retirement-security legislation we’re supporting

In the 131st Legislature, we’re supporting several legislative proposals to strengthen retirement security for retired state workers:

- **LD 111** requiring the State to pay a percentage of retirees’ Medicare Part B Advantage premiums based on their pension income. Sponsor: Rep. **Dan Shagoury**;
- **LD 197** An Act to Address Employee Retention at the Maine State Police Crime Laboratory and the Computer Crimes Unit in the Department of Public Safety. Sponsor: Rep. **Benjamin Collings**;
- **LD 483** An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Retirement Benefit Reductions for Certain Employees Currently Included in the 1998 Special Plan. Sponsor: Rep. **Bill Pluecker**;
- **LR 377** which mirrors LD 1746 An Act To Expand the 1998 Special Retirement Plan To Include Employees Who Work for the Office of Chief Medical Examiner, sponsored by Rep. **Tavis Hasenfus**.

“Things were fine for almost 15 years, until in 2011 the Legislature, at the urging of the (then-) governor, chose to change the parameters of the COLA, reducing its effectiveness, in order to reduce to obligation of the State to provide the promised pension. This was breaking faith with retired state employees.

“Over the years since, various legislatures have attempted to redress that wrong, but their efforts have never succeeded in completely undoing the damage done in 2011. It’s been 12 years since that break in faith. I’m hoping that this time, with a nice budget surplus, this Legislature will finally undo that unfair action taken in 2011, restore the COLA to its provisions prior to 2011, and make the retirees

damaged by that 2011 action whole.”

Ever since 2011, when taxes for the wealthy were cut at the expense of MainePERS participants, many retired state employees and teachers have been struggling to keep up with the cost of living. The 2011 pension cuts included:

- A freeze on retirees’ cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for 2011, 2012, and 2013;
- A 3% cap on all future cost-of-living adjustments;
- A permanent limit on cost-of-living adjustments so they only apply to the first \$20,000 of pension income adjusted for inflation.

Over the years, there’s been widespread recognition those cuts went too far and there have been proposals supported by legislators who are Democrats, Republicans and unenrolled to help provide solutions.

In 2022, we made some progress in undoing some of the harm caused by the 2011 pension cuts. The Bipartisan Supplemental State Budget (LD 1995) passed by both the Maine House and the Maine Senate, and signed into law by Governor Mills makes key improvements to MainePERS retirement pensions, including: increasing the 2021 cumulative COLA by an additional 1%; adding an additional 2.4% to the pension base; exempting the first \$25,000 in pension income from state income tax; and increasing the exemption amount by \$5,000 a year until it matches the exemptions for Social Security benefits. Those changes will help retirees now and will compound in future years, improving retirement benefits for all participants in the State, Judicial, Legislative and Teacher retirement plan.

There is more work to be done and it needs to be done now, by the 131st Maine Legislature and by Governor Mills. Fully fund a retiree COLA that matches inflation for MainePERS participants!

131st Maine Legislature —

Fund a full retiree cost-of-living adjustment

By Steve Butterfield

MSEA-SEIU Retiree Director for Area 2

On Feb. 10, Steve submitted this testimony to members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Labor and Housing Committee:

My name is Steven Butterfield. I am retired, but I am not a State of Maine retiree. I retired in December of 2017 after a total of 42 years serving on the staff of the Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989. My last 26 years was as director of information services.

During my tenure with MSEA-SEIU, I was appointed by governors, state senators, state representatives and union presidents to a myriad of committees, commissions, task forces and workgroups involving studies, redesigns and modifications to the Maine Public Employees Retirement System. Currently I am Governor Mills' appointee to the MainePERS Participating Local District Advisory Committee. Given all of this, I have a pretty good understanding of the State and



Steve Butterfield

“Not only did the LePage administration reduce the COLA cap from 4% to 3% they also added a \$20,000 cap on the amount of pension benefit that would be COLA eligible. Then they froze the COLA for three years. This was nothing more than financial terrorism for Maine’s state worker and teacher retirees. The frozen COLAs added three more years of falling further behind financially.”

— **Steve Butterfield,**

MSEA-SEIU Director representing Area 2

Teacher Retirement Plan.

When it comes to the cost of living adjustment (COLA) portion of the pension system, state workers and teachers have taken more than their share of hits over the last several decades.

The McKernan administration fired the first salvo back in the early 90's by putting state workers and teachers a year behind on their COLA by making new retirees wait a full year before becoming COLA eligible. Formerly, new retirees were COLA eligible if they retired by August of any year. That Administration also imposed the 4% COLA cap.

Fast forward to 2011 and the LePage Administration lowered the boom even more severely! Not only did the LePage administration reduce the COLA cap from 4% to 3% they also added a \$20,000 cap on the amount of pension benefit that would be COLA eligible. Then they froze the COLA for three years. This was nothing more than financial terrorism for Maine's state worker and teacher retirees. The frozen COLAs added three more years of falling further behind financially.

Now with these added hindrances and the current rampant inflation, which is far more than even the current cap could sustain, we see our retirees who gave years of dedicated service to the citizens of the State of Maine falling into financial despair. I urge you to fully fund the additional 6.1% of the 2022 9.1% MainePERS calculated COLA. Let's show retired state workers and teachers that they ARE still appreciated!

'Recognize the value of the contributions, sacrifices we made'

By Penny Whitney-Asdourian

President, MSEA-SEIU Androscoggin Valley Retirees Chapter

On Feb. 10, Penny testified before members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Labor and Housing Committee:

I am Penny Whitney-Asdourian from Scarborough. I am retired, having worked for the Maine Judicial Branch for over 33 years. My husband and I both currently receive a MainePERS pension and I am here to request this committee recommend the funding of a full cost of living adjustment (COLA) for our retirees.

Regarding the COLA, as you know, state retirees are not eligible for a full COLA based on CPI, but the COLA is capped at 3%.



Penny Whitney-Asdourian

Additionally, the COLA is not calculated on your full pension, but the 2011 budget cuts impacting the pensions put a cap on that as well, making it impossible for retirees to ever keep up with the cost of living.

While I certainly appreciate the budget that Governor Mills put forward, containing a “one-time” increase for our retirees, one-time fixes simply are not enough and fail to increase the base on which the next COLA can be calculated. This results in our retirees falling further and further behind. I am asking that you fund a full cumulative COLA in the biennial budget.

I am part of an organization that has allowed me frequent contact with our state retirees over the past few years. It is greatly concerning to me that there has been very little focus on the financial insecurities of retirees and the elderly in this state. Every day when you venture out you will encounter older Mainers who are still working. While some

are doing it simply to stay busy, a conversation will reveal that they are very dependent on the additional income to heat their homes, pay for their medications, and food.

I am asking that you take a small step in paying forward all that state retirees gave to assure quality services to the people of Maine. Please understand fully funding the COLA, and making it cumulative will not address the devastation that the 2011 cuts created, but it will go a long way in making sure our retirees feel that this Legislative body appreciates the commitment and dedication that were given during their careers with the state.

Every year we wonder if this will be the time when the Legislature recognizes the value of the contributions, and in many instances, the sacrifices, we made during our careers and tries to do right by us. In my mind, THIS is the time, THIS is the year.

I thank you for the job you are doing on behalf of all of us and for taking the time to listen to me.

Bring retiree COLA in line with inflation; apply it to pension base

By Rob Peale

MSEA-SEIU Retiree Member

Below is abridged testimony Rob gave to members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Labor and Housing Committee on Feb. 10:

My name is Rob Peale and I am a Readfield resident. I am also a retired State of Maine employee. I am asking for your support to fully fund a 9.1% COLA for MainePERS retirees as of September 2022 when the annual COLA for 2022 was applied. This

should also include a 9.1% increase in the pension base to which the COLA applies. Adding the money to the base will be much more helpful to public employees over the long term than the Governor's proposal of a one-time payment directly to public employee retirees.

In agreeing to work for state government, I was promised a far stronger pension than I have today, and it's falling further, and more quickly, behind the increasing cost of living. Bringing the 2022 COLA in line with current inflation and applying it to the base

will be a significant help to all public employees even if the current COLA cap of 3% continues to be applied in the future. The current budget surplus presents an opportunity for the current Legislature and governor to make some small amends for past actions even though the improvement will not come close to making public employees whole. Please fully fund a 2022 9.1% COLA for retired public employee pensions, including a 9.1% increase in the base. I also ask that you be open to additional changes that will help retirees recover additional pension benefits promised to us.

Apply now for our 2023 MSEA-SEIU scholarships



Tyler Brockway, son of Barbie Brockway of our Jay Poor/Richard West Chapter, won our 2022 Murray L. Brown Scholarship (\$1,000). He's attending Thomas College in Waterville.

One of the benefits of MSEA-SEIU membership is our scholarship program. We have 10 scholarships to award in 2023. Seven are for full-time students who are dependents of dues-paying MSEA-SEIU members. Three are for MSEA-SEIU members continuing their education. The MSEA-SEIU scholarships are:

2023 MSEA-SEIU Full-Time Student Scholarships. Seven scholarships ranging from \$750 to \$1,500 apiece are available for students who have one of the following relationships with a dues-paying MSEA-SEIU member: son or daughter of an MSEA member; stepchild of an MSEA member who resides with the MSEA member; son or daughter of the MSEA member's significant other who resides with the MSEA member in accordance with the sick leave article of the Executive Branch contract; student who is under legal guardianship of an MSEA member; and/or grandchild of an MSEA member who resides with the grandparent. Applicants must be entering

full-time post-secondary educational or vocational programs for the first time as freshmen. Download the full-time student application and instructions: bit.ly/MSEAstudent

2023 MSEA-SEIU Member (Part-Time Student) Scholarships. Three \$500 scholarships, one for each of the three MSEA Areas, are for MSEA-SEIU members enrolled in educational programs. These scholarships are for members who furthering their education either on a part-time basis while employed OR on a full-time basis after obtaining an educational leave of absence. Download the member (part-time student) application and instructions: bit.ly/MSEAmember

Applications and all required data for all scholarships must be received at MSEA-SEIU headquarters by April 21, 2023. If you have any questions, contact MSEA-SEIU Member Benefits Manager **Luanne Collins** at 622-3151 or Luanne.Collins@mseaseiu.org

EXECUTIVE BRANCH BARGAINING

Continued from Front Page

asbestos, mold and other toxins, to time and support in dealing with trauma at work.

Over the last few weeks, the bargaining team has been putting these core demands into shaping our bargaining proposals. We have prepared proposals on:

- Salary increases – to close the wage gap
- Completion and implementation of the classification study
- Health and safety – including improved language about safe work places
- Bereavement leave that is more inclusive
- Parental leave
- Telework
- Retirement – improving the portion paid by the state.
- Reimbursements – including mileage to the federal rate

Our work is not done; we are working on:

- Updating stipends, differentials and overtime language
- Our flexibility and scheduling proposal
- Additional safe staffing language
- Improved non-discrimination language

We are discussing proposals about student loan repayment and improved child care benefit as well.

A number of folks have joined the team during bargaining preparation sessions and all are welcome to join, listen in, share ideas and discuss proposals as we work on them.

The needs of all of us, especially to the need for the respect and pay we deserve for the vital work we do, must be heard and addressed in these negotiations. To do that, we must demonstrate to the administration that every step of the way, workers across the state are a part of the process and united to win a fair contract and stand up for the services

Our 2023 Executive Branch Negotiations Team

Dean Staffieri, President, MSEA-SEIU Local 1989

Operations, Maintenance and Support Services: David Boudreau (DOT), Andy Lane (DOT), Jason Hall (Ferry Service) and Joseph St. Pierre (DOT)

Administrative Services: Tracy Bonnevie (DOT), Cassey Tompson (Corrections) and Vanessa White (DHHS)

Supervisory Services: Erik Gordon (CDC), Patrick Lockhart (Corrections), Derryen Plante (MRS), Cynthia Sargeant (DHHS), Victor Tardiff (DOL) and Jon Woodard (DEP)

Professional-Technical Services: Kathy Anderson (DHHS), Mark Brunton (DHHS), Paul Carignan (Corrections), Candise Colfer (DAFS), Morgan Dunton (DOE), Catherine Figliolini (DOL), Tim Hebert (DOT), Luc Nya (DHHS), Brendan Parker (Public Safety), Kevin Staples (Marine Resources), Kevin Russell (DHHS) and Ramona Welton (BMV)

Mainers count on.

If you haven't done so already, please sign on in support of the core demands that will echo throughout the proposals we bring to the table. Management won't receive a copy of names who sign on; show us your support for a contract addressing the core demands. Sign on here: bit.ly/mseaCoreDemands

Also, join your coworkers in your worksite's contract team supporting our Negotiations Team: Join your worksite team by contacting MSEA-SEIU staffer Jonathan Brown: 622-3151 or jonathan.brown@mseaseiu.org

Increase Maine Maritime Academy funding

By Jake Adams
MSEA-SEIU Director

Jake testified Feb. 14 before the Legislature's Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. Excerpt:

I would like to testify in favor of the additional funding for Maine Maritime Academy. I live in Holden and work at Maine Maritime Academy in the IT department as a systems integration specialist, primarily working with Admissions and Financial Aid; I also serve on the board of MSEA-SEIU.

Additional funding for Maine Maritime Academy is critical. We have the opportunity to be recognized as the #1 Maritime Academy in the US and perhaps the world but we cannot achieve this running at our current levels of funding. Presently, comparable institutions SUNY, Texas A&M, Cal Maritime, etc. receive roughly 44% of their operating budget from their state. We receive 22% of our operating budget from the state. Similarly, institutions within the state that have a comparable number of FTEs receive around 44% of their operating budget from the state.

The lack of parity with regard to funding, however, has a lot of negative consequences, the main one being we have higher tuition than most comparable schools. Other schools capitalize on that fact. Maine Maritime Academy is 483% more expensive to attend than Mass Maritime for in-state tuition and out-of-state tuition is 49% higher (source: U.S. Department of Education and College Scorecard).

I also know our graduates tend to become endeared to our state. I know of a number of former students who purchase property in the state, vacation in the state, and after some sea time, even become employed in the state. I feel strongly that an investment in our institution brings a good return on investment for our state. I implore you to keep the additional funding for Maine Maritime Academy in the budget.