



# The State Employees' Association Of New Hampshire, Inc.

Service Employees International Union, Local 1984, CTW, CLC

October 4, 2021

Dear Governor,

Over the past several months, we have learned a lot about how the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the New Hampshire workforce, such as wages, cost of living, and benefits. As employers have struggled to fill positions, wages have been driven up and continue to trend in that direction. Major retailers like Target and Walmart, which historically have provided scant benefits and pay, are now improving wages and benefits to compete for limited applicants willing to work in the service industry. They have far surpassed the wages for similar State positions such as Liquor Retail Store Clerks by offering salaries of more than \$28.00 per hour with a \$5,000.00 signing bonus and benefits. Trucking companies are often more than doubling the starting wage of CDL drivers compared to similar positions at DOT, who pay so little kids in high school often make more with part-time afterschool jobs. The New Hampshire Department of Corrections has fewer employees this year than in previous years. It has also shown it cannot compete with surrounding states such as Massachusetts, which generally has a waiting list for applicants. These are just a few examples, but you know every State agency is dealing with similar problems; there are currently 446 open State positions.

There is no simple solution to solve all of the State's current economic and workforce problems, but one thing is obvious. For the State to even have a chance of continuing to operate at a functional level, it must be more competitive regarding wages to stop the hemorrhaging currently taking place with recruitment and retention at nearly every State agency.

The good news is that the State has the resources to address the concern we all share. As you are aware, New Hampshire received approximately \$994,500,000 from federal stimulus funds under the American Rescue Plan Act. The Act grants broad discretion to the State to allocate funds. Permissible use of said funds includes compensation for public employees. Therefore, given all the problems mentioned above, I am asking that the State begin a stipend program for its employees, both full and part-time, that would provide them \$300 per week for each week they work for the next 26 weeks. Such a stipend would adequately reward employees who have been working and struggling throughout the pandemic, attract new talent, and make the State of New Hampshire a competitive employer with other employers in the State.

Without this or a similar economic incentive for State workers, I am genuinely afraid the services provided, including critical services like plowing during winter storms or providing care at State-run hospitals and long-term care facilities, will begin to fail. We cannot plow roads without truck drivers at DOT. We cannot take care of the sick without nurses, counselors, and support staff. We cannot sell wine and spirits to fund State programs if there are no employees to stock shelves, operate registers, and open and close stores.

As a capitalist, I know you understand the principles of supply and demand. However, employees are currently in great demand. Therefore, this State needs to make the appropriate investment in its employees to ensure we keep providing these essential services to the citizens of New Hampshire.

Please consider this request. While the SEA and you have not always seen eye to eye, we have a singular interest in making sure the State can provide the services it has promised to its taxpayers.

Sincerely,

Rich Gulla, SEA President