

Crystal Ward  
LEWISTON, MEA-Retired  
LD 206

“Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and other members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, my name is Crystal Ward from Lewiston, I am a retired teacher and the MEA Retired Legislative chairperson representing over 5600 members across the State. I am here to testify neither for nor against the Governor’s proposal for a one-time, 1% cost of living adjustment for all current MainePERS retirees. The one-time 1% COLA does help, but is a small round bandage placed on a big wound.

I am here concerning the ever growing wound to our pensions made by the changes in 2011. The wound is the COLA capped at 3%, and the COLA calculated on only the first \$24,186.25 of pension income. Combined these have resulted in decreasing buying power for everyone in MainePERS. Every retired MainePers member has watched pension FAIL to keep pace with inflation and the result is many moving closer and closer to poverty. There are too many having a hard time paying the bills, and too many forced to make life altering decisions. With the current high inflation rates, raise in rents, food, fuel, about everything, the move towards poverty is increasing. When the COLA is only applied to part of the pension amount, inflation wins-- add in the COLA at over 8% and only receiving 3% and it a double hit! The wound inflicted in 2011 has turned into an even more gaping hole in 2023. It is past time for the Legislature to suture the wound and make the retirees pension whole again and give the real COLA increases. Across the State more and more retirees have told me they have cut to the bone and cannot make ends meet, drive a 15+ year old car and know they cannot afford even a used car, do not do needed home repairs, buy little meat, and buy nothing new. This situation was caused by a Legislature and it needs to be fixed by a Legislature. The longer the legislature waits to repair the gaping wound the worse the harm to retirees current and future. The time is now to figure out a way to FIX the gaping wound and make the pension whole and keep pace with inflation .