

March 2, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, members of the Committee on Transportation, I'm Ramona Welton, writing as a private citizen on my own time and as both a member and immediate past president of my union, the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. My union represents over 13,000 Maine workers, including workers in all three branches of Maine State Government.

I work as an Auditor II for the Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) within the Maine Department of Secretary of State, where I am proudly in my 39<sup>th</sup> year of service to my fellow Maine citizens. As a career public servant, I'm here to provide you with a sense of what's happening in terms of staffing right now in the BMV as you make decisions on the proposed State Budget and LD 258, "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025" (Emergency), (Governor's Bill) Sponsored by Representative Melanie Sachs.

The BMV is seriously understaffed. It has an employee vacancy rate of 10 percent. Since January 27, 2023, the Department has been advertising for a slew of positions, including:

- **Customer Rep Associate I** Court Records
- **Customer Rep Associate II-MV** Portland
- **Driver License Examiner** Exams-Topsham
- **MV Branch Office Manager** Augusta Branch
- **Customer Rep Associate II-MV** Lewiston -part time, 20 hours
- **Customer Rep Associate II-MV** Portland/Rover
- **Customer Rep Associate II-MV** Bangor
- **Customer Rep Associate I for Court Records**
- **Office Associate I for Numeric's**
- **Customer Rep 1 for Exams**
- **Database Administrator**
- **Customer Rep Associate I** Exams

- **Driver License Examiner** Lewiston
- **Office Associate I for the Switchboard**
- **Office Specialist I for Registrations**
- **Driver License Examiner for Springvale and Portland**
- **Archivist II for Archives**
- **Agency Application Architect for IS**
- **Customer Rep Associate II** License Services
- **Office Specialist I** Registrations -Long Term Trailers

The recruitment and retention problem is impacting the delivery of BMV services statewide. Due to short staffing, some regional BMV offices occasionally have to close for parts of the day. The understaffing is particularly problematic in small offices like Calais.

A number of entry-level positions are vacant in the BMV's main office in Augusta. These positions can be difficult to fill. It's phone work and the reality of entry-level jobs is folks often only stay long enough until they find a better-paying job elsewhere. The fact is, other Maine employers have been doing a much better job at providing pay that is much more attractive than what the State of Maine currently pays. High housing costs also are an issue in finding workers at BMV branch offices in communities like Portland and Scarborough, as well as communities like Augusta and Bangor. Even if folks can afford housing, they might not be able to afford to commute to these and other BMV offices at the rate the State currently pays.

The constant churn of employees within the Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles is threatening the institutional knowledge that BMV workers have passed on to each other. With big projects coming up such as plans for a new Maine license plate, as well as the ongoing new technology being incorporated into our work, it's essential for the BMV to have an experienced and qualified workforce so it can meet the needs of all Maine citizens regardless of where they live in our great state.

Recruitment and retention, and low pay, are issues impacting more than just the BMV. They are impacting all departments of Maine State Government. [The State of Maine Market Study Report](#) dated November 20, 2020, documents that State of Maine workers are underpaid, on average, 15 percent compared to our counterparts throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional differences. 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%.

It's past time that the State ends the State Employee Pay Gap. It's the right thing to do – and it's also necessary for the State to recruit and retain qualified workers for the kinds of positions the BMV is seeking to fill right now. That's why I respectfully ask that you include funding in the proposed State Budget to end the State Employee Pay Gap. Thank you and I'm glad to answer any questions.