

**Testimony of Jeff McCabe
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989**

**Support of LD 121, An Act To Expand Health Insurance Coverage To Certain State
Employees, sponsored by Senator Craig Hickman
Before the Senate Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services.**

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and honorable members of the committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services. We are providing this testimony in support of LD 121, An Act To Expand Health Insurance Coverage To Certain State Employees.

Many seasonal workers who are planning to return to the same or similar positions for the state are often not eligible for unemployment benefits and are often low wage workers. Many are earning around \$15 dollars an hour. Numerous examples of this can be found, but we are providing one: <https://mainebhr.hire.trakstar.com/jobs/fk0xx9m/>

We agree with the bill sponsor that health insurance is a moral imperative. “I present this bill to ensure that, as we work to expand health care to more Maine people as a moral imperative, we don’t forget to take care of our own. According to the State Office of Employee Health and Benefits, over 500 state employees are seasonal or session-only.”

We are also facing a moment when across all state agencies, we are in crisis with staffing shortages. At the same time, the demand on the services seasonal workers are providing is only growing.

Maine state park campgrounds set attendance record in 2022. It marks the third consecutive year of record-breaking attendance by campers at state parks:
<https://www.pressherald.com/2023/01/05/maine-state-park-campgrounds-set-attendance-record-in-2022/>

On 3/8/23 - Amanda Beal, commissioner, Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry explained some these challenges.

Video testimony at 11:26 AND at 11:34: [Maine Legislature](#)

“When we back out those seasonal positions, our vacancy rate not including those is 7.7%, The vast majority of those positions we are the process of recruiting for so they’re posted. There are some positions in there that, like the conversations we’ve been having with the Board of Pesticides Control that we just don’t have the funding to fill and so we’re trying to work that out with these conversations we’re having here.”

“I have heard from everyone in my bureau --- directors, all four of them. Within the last month we’ve had conversations about the challenges we face across the department in

recruitment and retaining staff because there's a wage gap between what we can offer and what they can get elsewhere, and that's just a very real challenge that we're facing."

"I would say they're in the category, of as I spoke before, of there being sort of a wage gap. It is one of the places where we have to work really hard. One of the things we have to do, not just these positions but others that are challenges to fill, is post multiple times, 2, 3 times.

With seasonal positions you get to a point in the season where it doesn't make sense to post them anymore because you're going to get somebody on board and by the time you get them trained it's almost time for their position to be over, so yeah, this is definitely a category where we experience that. There are certain positions where there are other opportunities with the same skill set where they can go and they can make more money. It's the competitive nature of what we can pay them."

In the department's testimony, they flagged: "The fiscal burden of this bill would primarily be borne by departments with high concentrations of seasonal employees- namely the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and the Department of Transportation. Furthermore, the State has no guarantee that seasonal employees will return to employment each season, as a result departments could end up paying for benefits while an employee is not in active status."

We see this bill as actually helping to get employees to return each season to help fill numerous vacancies in key natural resource agencies and the Department of Transportation. The issue of seasonal employees paying their portion of the premiums would be similar to how legislators pay their premium in the off session, and also due to the low pay these seasonal workers receive, we wonder if they would even make enough to trigger having to pay anything.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.