

Testimony of Beth White  
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989

In Support of LD 2097, Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Project to Alleviate the Staffing Crisis in the  
Child Protective Services System  
Sponsored by Senator Lisa Keim

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,  
Jan. 31, 2024, 10 AM, Cross Office Building Room 209, and Electronically

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, I'm Beth White, director of politics and legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. The Maine Service Employees Association represents over 13,000 workers across the state, including workers at the Office of Child and Family Services.

LD 2097 would help increase staffing in the Office of Child and Family Services by requiring the Department of Health & Human Services to develop and implement a pilot project focused on the recruitment and employment of case aides, prioritizing the areas with the greatest need for assistance, as determined by the department. This pilot would also include a public recruitment campaign targeting retirees and those not currently in the workforce.

We support the idea of hiring additional case aides and believe doing so would be a good step forward to address the concerns raised by workers in the Maine DHHS Office of Child and Family Services. However, we would strongly oppose allowing any new positions to be outside of our contracts, pilot project or no pilot project. If the Maine Legislature and the administration are serious about hiring case aides under a pilot project, then we would expect Maine Bureau Human Resources to work with us to make sure there are no delays in hiring and training.

Also, while we support the Department considering higher rates of compensation for case aides hired under the pilot project, it is essential that any compensation increases for case aides covers ALL case aides, including those currently working for the department. Creating a two-tier pay system where current case aides are compensated at a lower rate than pilot project case aides would likely increase retention issues among current staff significantly. Higher compensation for all case aides should be considered under the pilot project, not just one subset of workers.

We appreciate the intent of this legislation and are willing to work with the Committee as it moves forward to ensure that all workers in the child protective system have a collective voice to continue advocating for themselves, their coworkers, and most importantly, the children and families they serve.

Thank you for your consideration.