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**02/08/24 Public Hearing**  
**Testimony of Carol L. Sanborn, President IAMAW Local Lodge S-89**  
**In support of LD 2121: “An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions”**

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and other members of the Committee:

I am a resident of Dresden and a paralegal who has for almost 40 years helped injured workers throughout the entire State. I am President of Machinists’ Union (IAMAW) Local S-89; we have eight bargaining units in four counties. I am here before you today on my own time because this is important to me personally, to thousands of State employees, and to all of Maine’s residents.

Through my legal work, my Union affiliation, and my personal experience, I have encountered hundreds of Maine State employees in all of our various Departments. The chronic understaffing within State government creates many difficult situations for both employees and residents seeking services. Because State pay rates have not kept up with labor market trends, the State has essentially become a training ground. People are interested in State jobs only when they can’t find employment in the private sector; once they acquire experience and skills, they leave for private sector jobs that have higher pay and better benefits. This creates a cycle in which we have now been stuck for at least a decade. I recently discussed this bill with a senior department manager. This person told me:

*We have become a jack-of-all trades and a master of none. We keep coming up with short-term resolutions that burn out employees by requiring them to jump from fire to fire, and then they leave State government. We are having to pull people away from other work to keep different areas operational because we lack employees due to our low pay scale. Due to this shuffling, other programs suffer. It is a domino effect. There is also a lack of younger employees to provide continuity of operations. In the next several years as more people retire, the knowledge necessary to provide services will be lost and more inefficiencies will be experienced, thus increasing the cost of government and reducing the speed of services.*

In my work I communicate with State employees multiple times every day. I have clients who are State employees and in my work rely upon the workers who staff the Workers’ Compensation Board, the Bureau of Insurance, the Department of Labor, and the

Department of Public Safety. We all rely upon State employees every single day. Without them, our “Departments” would be nothing more than empty infrastructure.

From my own life I will offer two examples of situations where State employees have had a huge impact upon my family:

My son has Down Syndrome. When he was born, our family found itself engaging with a system with which we had no experience. It was overwhelming and confusing. However, we discovered that within it was an amazing network of professionals who could find the answer to any question, suggest a course of action for any difficult situation, and understand what assistance we required better than we did. I will always be grateful for the wonderful professionals with Child Development Services who (under the supervision of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education), helped us navigate this journey. My son is currently 22 and we are now learning the intricacies of the adult services system. He is employed part-time, lives in an apartment, is a second-year student at StriveU in Portland, and takes one SMCC class per semester. To participate in these programs successfully, there are a myriad of forms to file and deadlines to which we must adhere. There are services available which I did not know existed, but to utilize them effectively, I must be able to get a timely, accurate response to questions and have the documents processed properly. There is sometimes bewildering overlap with federal laws regulations and only a trained professional could know how to maneuver through this. It is critical that the people staffing these State government programs have manageable caseloads and the knowledge and training necessary. In order to maintain continuity, we must be able to keep people in these positions, and to do that, we have to pay them what they are worth.

Another State service where I've personally witnessed the negative impact of staffing shortages is that of the Maine State Ferry System. We regularly travel to and from Vinalhaven. When there is a crew shortage on any ferry to any of the islands, they have to cancel that trip. Different boats have different staffing requirements and managers often try to minimize the impact by moving boats and personnel around. This results in last-minute cancellations and makes the service unreliable. Island residents who have important medical appointments often are required get to the mainland a day early to ensure they don't miss their treatment, specialist visit, or imaging. This means that during a period where they are already disadvantaged by injury or disease they incur the additional expenses of hotel stays and restaurant meals while they wait for the next ferry to be staffed...maybe. They may run into the same issue when trying to return home. Likewise, visitors to the islands may not be able to return home as expected. I have witnessed people who (due to cancellations caused by crew shortages) have missed flights and other connections, and those who after leaving their rental, couldn't leave the island, yet couldn't obtain lodging because none was available. As a result, vacationers suffering this sort of inconvenience and additional expense often cannot risk returning and experiencing the same issues. Tourism and lobstering are pretty much the only industries on our islands, and given the state of our fishery, we cannot risk losing tourism too. People having the qualifications to operate these boats are paid a great

deal more in private sector employment, and currently the Department of Transportation cannot offer what it would take to recruit staff.

If passed, the positive effects of this bill will not be limited to a particular geographic area. This bill does not give to one group and take away from another. It benefits all Maine people regardless of geography, political affiliation, race, religion, culture, gender, or age. This bill presents you with a unique opportunity to improve the lives of thousands of people throughout our entire State. Maine's State government employees and residents are counting on you to address this problem in a way which will encourage recruitment of qualified individuals, retain knowledgeable staff, and allow these workers to provide services to our residents in an efficient and adequate manner. I encourage you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 2121.