

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

**On LD 2214, An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025 (Emergency) (Governor's Bill) Sponsored by Representative Melanie Sachs**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
2pm Wednesday, February 28, 2024, State House Room 228 and Electronically**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Committee on Judiciary, I'm Beth White, Director of Politics & Legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. We are a labor union representing over 13,000 Maine workers, including workers in the Judicial Branch and at the Office of the Attorney General.

First, we support all proposed reclassifications, reorganizations, and range changes that appear in the proposed supplemental budget, some of which are outside of MSEA bargaining units. We also support the one-time funding for a volume increase in guardian ad litem, interpreter, and mental health examiner services within the courts system. These investments in our courts system should help with the backlog of cases and impossible workloads that many Judicial Branch employees are facing.

As you heard during Maine Supreme Court Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill's State of the Judiciary speech on February 21, our judicial system is in a better place than last year, but there are still improvements to be made. She reported that more staff and funding for modern technology are needed, and we agree, as there are 40 to 45 percent more pending criminal cases in the judicial system right now than in 2019 prior to the COVID pandemic.

Workers in the Judicial Branch care immensely about the work they do and recognize the significance that the court system plays in the lives of Maine citizens. They're doing their best to provide services with the resources they have. One of our judicial branch members provided testimony during the 2023 biennial budget hearings, which [you can view here](#). Even with the initiatives enacted under the biennial budget, the problem has not been solved, and further investments in our judicial system are necessary.

We also strongly support the initiatives in the supplemental budget related to costs incurred by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) after the Lewiston tragedy. Staff from the OCME were on the scene soon after the tragic events unfolded. They worked

long, traumatic hours alongside their fellow first responders. The current budget for the office is \$2.6 million, including salaries & benefits; the funding included in the supplemental budget proposal is essential to cover the additional costs incurred while responding in Lewiston, especially since the overall workload at the OCME has increased and they already operate on a budget that is about half of the national average. You will hear from OCME workers today about their experiences and the need for this funding in more detail. We would also like to take this opportunity to say thank you to not only the workers at the OCME, but to all the Mainers who responded to Lewiston and served our state during one of its most tragic moments.

We would also like to ask this committee to fund [LD 610](#), “An Act to Expand the 1998 Special Retirement Plan to Include Employees Who Work for the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner” in the supplemental budget. This legislation, currently on the Special Appropriations Table, would move employees at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) into the 1998 Special Plan. The 1998 Special Plan allows workers to retire at age 55 with 25 years of service; the workers eligible for this special plan do work that is high risk, high stress, and often traumatic. OCME workers have difficult jobs and are constantly exposed to trauma, which impacts themselves and their families. They were the only first responders to the Lewiston tragedy who do not have some type of special retirement plan. Including funding for LD 610 in the supplemental budget would help recruit and retain staff and show thanks and appreciation for the twelve Mainers who do this challenging and critically important work. Many workers from the OCME spoke in support of LD 610 during a public hearing on March 3, 2023 – you can [view their testimonies here](#).

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

**News Coverage Related to Judicial Branch:**

Portland Press Herald, “High court chief justice says Maine must invest in tech and staff to solve system’s backlog, 2/21/24: <https://www.pressherald.com/2024/02/21/supreme-justice-says-maine-needs-to-invest-in-tech-staff-to-solve-continued-backlog/>

Portland Press Herald, “New study says Maine courts need more staff to reduce a rising backlog, 6/5/23: <https://www.pressherald.com/2023/06/05/new-study-says-maine-courts-need-more-staff-to-reduce-a-rising-case-backlog/>