

**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 Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
1pm Monday, March 4, 2024, State House Room 228 and Electronically**

Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Sachs, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, 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 many workers in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry.

First, we support the language proposed in Part III, which would transfer \$6 million from the unappropriated surplus of the General Fund for damage incurred during recent storms. These funds will leverage federal and state emergency relief funds with reimbursements going to the General Fund. The storms that hit Maine in December and January were devastating in so many ways, and our state parks were heavily impacted. Funding will be necessary to address the damage, especially since the parks are already understaffed. On our MSEA Facebook page, you can [view photos of the damage](#) at Popham Beach State Park and Reid State Park, and [a video of the damage](#) at Reid State Park.

We also support all proposed reclassifications, reorganizations, and range changes that appear in the proposed supplemental budget. However, it's important to note that the current classification and compensation system for state employees was put in place in the late 1970's. When the system was created, the Legislature also included in state law a requirement for the Bureau of Human Resources to provide active reviews, management and oversight of the entire compensation and classification system every 10 years. Each subsequent administration has failed to do this basic maintenance, and both state workers and Mainers who count on state services are paying the price for their intransigence. We need a new classification and compensation system to truly address the issues with the current system, rather than making small-scale changes every budget cycle.

In 2019, the State contracted with Segal Consulting to conduct a classification and compensation study. The compensation study was designed by a joint labor-management

committee and utilized a sampling of “benchmark” positions to determine the average compensation of state government positions. The compensation portion of the study was completed in 2020. It showed state workers were underpaid 15% on average compared to their public and private sector counterparts throughout Maine and New England. Unless the state employee pay gap is addressed, it will continue to be a challenge to recruit and retain qualified workers; that’s why we support LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing in Maine State Government, sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine, to proceed as emergency legislation. LD 2121 would:

- Provide \$165 million in funding for a new compensation and classification system that closes the state employee pay gap for Executive Branch workers;
- Require the administration to report annually to the Maine Legislature on all Executive Branch job vacancies, so that the Legislature can adequately assess the ongoing staffing crisis;
- Improve laws relating to recruitment and retention adjustments, making it easier to establish recruitment and retention programs targeting agencies experiencing chronic understaffing;
- Require the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services and the Bureau of Human Resources to develop a plan to improve the state government hiring process

The state employee pay gap impacts all areas of state government, including workers at the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. We are fortunate to live in the most forested state in the nation, with ample natural resources at our fingertips. For DACF employees to be able to fulfill their duties for our beautiful state, they must be compensated well and the department must be fully staffed. Closing the state employee pay gap and passing LD 2121 are essential to recruit and retain qualified workers at DACF and across state government.

Thank you for your consideration.