



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

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation
1pm Tuesday, April 29, 2025,
State House Room 126 and Electronically**

In support of LD 947, An Act to Clarify Overnight Docking at Mainland Ports for Certain Island Ferry Vessels, Sponsored by Representative Ann Matlack

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, members of the Committee on Transportation, 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 for the Maine State Ferry Service within MainesDOT.

We are here to support LD 947. As you know, LD 947 would require to allow a ferry operated by the Maine State Ferry Service to dock overnight at its island port or to dock at a mainland port when that docking is common practice, with the exception that the department may require a ferry vessel to dock at a mainland port or at an alternative island port for an emergency situation, including, but not limited to, an extreme weather event.

For the past two years, workers at the Maine State Ferry Service have raised serious concerns about the direction that management is taking the ferry service. Specifically, the issue of where the ferries are docked overnight is central to the issue of staffing for the ferry service.

MainesDOT management has indicated it plans to implement [the docking of ferries on the mainland overnight within two to three years](#). Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note has stated that [island housing for ferry workers would be phased](#) out as part of the plan to dock ferries overnight on the mainland. Ferry crew obviously have multiple concerns, including but not limited to: the security and safety of ferries that would be docked on the mainland overnight, both in terms of weather conditions and overall ferry security; and the current lack of mainland housing for ferry workers should management's mainland-docking plan be implemented.

In a survey by our union that 34 ferry workers participated in earlier this year:

26 respondents, or 76.5%, said **they don't support the department's plan to dock the ferries overnight on the mainland if there weren't any changes to support the current crew members**. Of the remaining respondents, nearly 15% weren't sure and only 9%, or 3 respondents, indicated support for the plan.

17 respondents, or 50%, said **they wouldn't be able to keep their current jobs if the ferries were docked overnight on the mainland**.

27 respondents, or 79%, live on the mainland; 9% live on Vinalhaven and 9% live in North Haven.

Among the survey responses from ferry workers about management's plan to dock the ferries on the mainland:

"Crews living on the islands would need housing on the mainland in order to work on the ferries. And the ferry would not be available to make emergency medical (trips) at night from the islands."

"The mainland boat is the hardest to find relief crews for. I feel this move would compound the crewing difficulty."

"This change would not only impact the students, but the parents going to work on the mainland and any other residents."

"If me and my whole crew live an hour+ away from the boat, how do we keep watch on it during bad weather?"

"I would remain living on the island and would need crew housing on the mainland. I could only keep the job if housing was provided on the mainland during my work weeks."

"The majority of island-based employees live too far away to continue working and there are not enough mariners located close to mainland-based ferries, or they would already work for us."

"I would look for another job."

As such, our primary concerns about management's proposal to dock ferries overnight on the mainland include:

- Potential loss of crew housing on the islands. Currently crew housing is provided on Islesboro, North Haven, Vinalhaven and Swan Island. To be sure, it's our understanding that management's stated mainland plan would retain crew housing on Vinalhaven, with one Vinalhaven ferry docked on Vinalhaven and the other on the mainland.
- The impact on ferry workers who live on the mainland, some of whom live one or two hours, or more, from the ferry terminals, would be substantial. Would MaineDOT provide mainland housing for them, and, if so, under what circumstances?
- How would ferry workers who live on the islands get to the mainland for the first shift of the day?
- We also share the serious concerns of island community leaders and residents about the importance of having the ferries available overnight on the islands for emergency-services

purposes, including situations where islanders need to be transported via stretcher or ambulance in medical emergencies. [Please take a moment to watch this video](#) demonstrating the process that North Haven EMS uses to load a patient onto a private boat for an emergency medical evacuation.

- Docking the ferries on the mainland overnight also would greatly impact islanders who commute to the mainland or need earlier ferry service compared to what is currently provided with island-based ferries.

Please support LD 947 to ensure continuity and staffing of the Maine State Ferry Service. Thank you and I would be glad to answer any questions.