

January 20, 2026

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Mastraccio, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor, I write to you in regard to LD 2067: 1998 Special Retirement Plan.

My name is Michelle Spinney. I reside in Winslow Maine and I am a 54 year old single mother to a spirited 12 year old daughter named Summer. She has been witness to 12 of the 32 years of service I have given to the Department of Health and Human Services, first as a Mental Health Worker I, then as a Mental Health Worker III and now as a Community Response Worker.

Summer was only a baby when I got hurt in the Crisis House while placing a client in a two arm restraint to prevent him from smashing his head against the front door. The client lifted his feet off the ground, dropping to the floor, taking us both down to the ground. I was out of work for 4 weeks with Sciatica. I received 60% of my pay from Workers Compensation those 4 weeks as I did not have enough benefit time to cover the 160 hours lost due to having taken 2 months off after my daughter was born.

When Summer was 7, she was home with my wife at the time who received a call from Maine General in Augusta letting her know I had been in a car accident. All state offices had been closed due to severe inclement weather but being an essential worker, I had to drive to our Crisis House to relieve my coworker. My four-wheel drive vehicle got caught up in a mix of snow and freezing rain, pulling me head on into a guardrail in Windham. The result of that accident was a concussion, whiplash and a left knee contusion. I was out of work for 3 months, using up 480 hours of my benefit time in order to avoid the 60% pay from Workers Compensation. For the first several months following my return to work, my daughter would beg me not to go as she was petrified I would get hurt again driving to work. To this day, she associates inclement weather with my car accident, sometimes pleading with tears in her eyes for me to "just call in sick."

In October of 2023, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I was told by Human Resources, as a Community Response Worker, I could not go on light duty upon my return. From January 8, 2024 to March 20, 2024 I depleted all my sick, vacation and comp time in order to attend appointments at Dana Farber in Boston then having a bilateral mastectomy and lymph node dissection from my ride armpit/arm on March 1, 2024. Still recovering from surgery, I received 320 hours from the Catastrophic Leave Bank, allowing me to remain out of work with 100% of my pay until May 14, 2024. To keep my health insurance and not pay the state of Maine's portion of the premium, I had to return to work part-time while going through Chemotherapy, resulting in only receiving 50% of my pay. I returned to work full time on June 28 still dealing with the side effects from Chemotherapy then the side effects from radiation in August. Why is

this relevant? There have been many studies done by Institutes like Harvard, Dana Farber, Mayo Clinic and National Health Institute regarding the effects of shift work, swing shifts and rotating schedules. They all have concluded the following:

Working swing shifts disrupts your body's internal clock ([circadian rhythm](#)), leading to fatigue, poor concentration, and increased risks for serious issues like metabolic disorders (obesity, diabetes), [cardiovascular disease](#), [mental health problems](#) (depression, anxiety), gastrointestinal issues, and accidents, plus potential family/social conflicts. These effects stem from sleep deprivation and eating/activity patterns misaligned with natural light cycles, impacting hormones and overall well-being.

### **Common Effects of Swing Shifts**

- [Sleep & Alertness](#): Insomnia, excessive daytime sleepiness, fatigue, poor concentration, reduced reaction time, headaches, and increased risk of accidents.
- [Metabolic Health](#): Higher risk of obesity, metabolic syndrome, Type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular issues like hypertension, often linked to poor diet and hormonal changes.
- [Mental Health](#): Increased irritability, anxiety, depression, and burnout, as well as difficulty coping with stress.
- [Gastrointestinal Issues](#): Abdominal discomfort, constipation, diarrhea, and IBS due to disrupted eating habits and gut microbiome changes.
- [Accident Risk](#): Higher rates of workplace and motor vehicle accidents due to decreased alertness and fatigue.
- [Social & Family Life](#): Strain on relationships, isolation, and conflicts between work and family life.

### **Long-Term Risks**

- [Cardiovascular Disease](#): Increased risk of heart attacks and strokes.
- [Cancer](#): Classified as a probable carcinogen (Group 2A) by IARC, with links to breast, prostate, and colorectal cancers, possibly due to melatonin disruption.

I have worked third shift for 32 years. 1(16hr) and 2(12hr) shifts. This has been my choice due to the passion and dedication I have to the Developmental Disability, Brain Injury and Intellectual Disability population that I serve. My heart is still very much in this job but after 32 years and at the age of 54, my body is fatigued, exhausted and drained. I have degenerative

disc disease in my neck and lower back. My left knee has severe arthritis. Mentally, I struggle with mood swings, due to the fatigue night shift causes, from the concussion in 2020 while working and from the continued effects after Chemotherapy.

The passing of LD 2067 will allow me to retire with the same dignity and respect I have provided to my clients and providers my whole career. It will give my daughter a sense of security and peace of mind she has never witnessed. This bill provides the morale and worker retention a Community Response Worker so greatly lacking. Please take the time to consider the magnitude of sacrifice from my fellow Community Response Workers as well as from myself and pass LD 2067.

Sincerely,

Michelle Spinney

Augusta Team CRW