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President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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*Testimony of Senate President Mattie Daughtry in support of
LD 2067, "An Act to Include Certain Community Mental Health Workers
Under the 1998 Special Plan for Retirement"
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor*

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and esteemed members of the Labor Committee, my name is Mattie Daughtry and I am proud to serve as the President of the Maine State Senate, where I am honored to represent Senate District 23, which includes Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island and part of Yarmouth. Today, I write to express my strong support for LD 2067.

This bill would amend the 1998 Special Plan under the Maine Public Employees Retirement System to include a group of dedicated community mental health workers employed by the Department of Health and Human Services on October 1, 2025. Specifically, it would affect those providing crisis outreach and crisis services to adults with developmental or intellectual disabilities who currently hold the job classification of Community Response Worker and previously the classification of Mental Health Worker III.

These men and women provide essential direct care services every single day. They are on the front lines of Maine's behavioral health system, responding in the community and in residential settings to crises that too often involve emotional distress, safety risks, and situations that put the worker at physical and psychological risk. Unlike many other workers, they regularly go alone into someone's home or community environment with minimal backup, a reality that makes their job both uniquely challenging and inherently hazardous.

The 1998 Special Plan exists to recognize careers that, by their nature, involve heightened risks and require a level of commitment and resilience beyond what is reasonably expected over the course of a full working life. It allows qualifying public employees to retire earlier, often at age 55 with sufficient creditable service, acknowledging that long careers in certain roles take a toll on body and mind and that retiring with dignity should be possible for those who have dedicated decades of service under difficult conditions.

Over the past session, we made progress expanding the Special Plan to include additional public servants whose jobs warrant this recognition. LD 2067 builds on that progress. It focuses on a cohort of skilled crisis workers who are the backbone of community-based supports for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Their work not only benefits the individuals they serve and their families, but also helps keep people safely in their homes and communities rather than in institutional settings, a public benefit that carries real human and economic value.

Importantly, this bill is also a workforce bill. Maine's health and human services workforce is under enormous strain. Recruitment and retention challenges threaten the continuity and quality of care that

individuals in crisis depend on. Providing access to the Special Plan for these workers is a smart step toward making these positions sustainable careers. It sends a clear message: Maine values this work, and we will support these workers with retirement security that aligns with the realities of what they do. As we've heard again and again from providers and advocates, without thoughtful policies to support this workforce, we risk losing more workers to burnout or to other states that offer better benefits.

This Committee has before it an opportunity to affirm that public service in difficult, unpredictable, and emotionally demanding roles merits retirement benefits that honor a lifetime of service. LD 2067 does exactly that, it aligns the retirement system with the lived experiences of crisis response professionals, enhances stability within a critical workforce sector, and demonstrates that the Legislature stands with workers who serve Maine's most vulnerable with compassion and professionalism.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote in support of LD 2067.