

Testimony by
Gerard P. Conley, Jr.
in support of
LD 2169 (February 3, 2026)

**SENATOR MICHAEL TIPPING, REPRESENTATIVE AMY ROEDER,
AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON LABOR:**

**MY NAME IS JERRY CONLEY AND I LIVE AT 71 AUSTIN STREET,
PORTLAND, MAINE. I AM AN ATTORNEY IN PORTLAND AND I HAVE
BEEN PRACTICING FOR 45 YEARS. ONE OF MY SPECIALITIES HAPPENS
TO BE HANDLING DISABILITY APPEALS FOR MEMBERS OF THE MAINE
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM (MainePERS).**

**FIRST, I AM PROUD TO SAY THAT 35 YEARS AGO I WAS THE 2ND
SENATOR ON THIS VERY IMPORTANT COMMITTEE. I AM SORRY THAT
THIS ZOOM SESSION PREVENTS ME FROM FULFILLING MY**

RESPONSIBILITY OF PROVIDING THIS COMMITTEE WITH SOME GOODIES IN ORDER TO KEEP THE TRADITIONS REQUIRED OF FORMER COMMITTEE MEMBERS ALIVE.

IN 2021, I WAS ONE OF DOZENS OF INDIVIDUALS WHO APPEARED BEFORE THIS COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF LEGISLATION WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT A GREAT NUMBER OF CHANGES TO THE DISABILITY LAWS AND RULES IMPACTING MainePERS MEMBERS. IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF A KINDER, GENTLER, MainePERS AND LEAD TO MANY DISABLED MEMBERS BEING ABLE TO WIN THEIR DISABILITY CASES.

ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHANGES THAT CAME OUT OF THAT LEGISLATION WAS THE ABOLISHMENT OF THE SYSTEM'S MEDICAL BOARD, WHICH WAS THE ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR LEADING THE WAY TO DENY SO MANY CLAIMS. TO THE SYSTEM'S CREDIT, IT ENCOURAGED THE COMMITTEE TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSED CHANGES AT THAT TIME AND THEY WERE ADOPTED. SINCE THAT TIME, THERE

ARE FAR FEWER CASES BEING LITIGATED IN ATTEMPTS TO SECURE BENEFITS FOR DESERVING MEMBERS. IF THE SYSTEM WERE TO SHARE WITH THE COMMITTEE THE NUMBER OF PENDING CASES NOW, AS OPPOSED TO WHAT THEY WERE IN 2020, THE DROP IN NUMBERS WOULD BE A SHOCK TO ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH THE WAY MainePERS PREVIOUSLY TREATED DISABILITY APPLICATIONS – A FACT WHICH IS A VERY PLEASANT ONE FROM MY PERSPECTIVE.

AS A PERSON WHO HAS FOUGHT WITH THE SYSTEM OVER THE YEARS, I BELIEVE THAT IT DESERVES GREAT CREDIT FOR ITS CHANGE OF HEART TOWARDS MEMBERS APPLYING FOR DISABILITY. SINCE THE PASSAGE OF THE BILL IN 2021, MIKE COLLERAN, CHIEF COUNSEL TO THE SYSTEM, HAS HELD MEETINGS WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS WHO ARE IMPACTED BY DISABILITY ISSUES AND HE RECEIVED INPUT FROM ALL TO DESIGN RULES THAT TREAT MEMBERS FAIRLY. HE MADE SURE THAT THOSE CHANGES OCCURRED BACK THEN AND CONTINUE TO OCCUR AS NEEDED.

THE BILL PRESENTLY BEFORE THE COMMITTEE, ALSO THE WORK OF MIKE AND HIS STAFF, IS THE LATEST EXAMPLE OF THE SYSTEM'S CHANGE OF HEART IN THE WAY IT TREATS MEMBERS WHO ARE CURRENTLY RECEIVING BENEFITS.

THE PROPOSED CHANGES, WHICH HAVE BEEN DESCRIBED IN DETAIL BY PREVIOUS SPEAKERS, ALL AMOUNT TO FAIRER, KINDER, AND GENTLER TREATMENT OF DISABLED MainePERS MEMBERS. I AM THRILLED TO BE HERE TO SUPPORT THESE CHANGES AND I COMMEND THE SYSTEM FOR BRINGING THEM FORWARD FOR APPROVAL BY THIS COMMITTEE. I AM HOPEFUL THAT THE BILL WILL SENT TO THE RESPECTIVE CHAMBERS FOR THEIR APPROVAL AND EVENTUALLY TO THE GOVERNOR FOR HER SIGNATURE.

IN CLOSING, I WANT TO THANK THE COMMITTEE FOR LISTENING TO MY COMMENTS. I WILL ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THE COMMITTEE MIGHT HAVE ABOUT THE BILL.

Gerard Conley
Portland
LD 2169

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IN SUPPORT OF
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