

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations Committee, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Amy Chery. I am here on my own personal time to speak in support of funding LD 579, *An Act to Include Certain Mental Health Workers Under the 1998 Special Plan for Retirement*, as part of the Governor's proposed supplemental budget, LD 2212.

In the last budget, many of my coworkers and I were wrongfully excluded from the amended version of LD 579. I am asking this body to correct that exclusion and include the mental health workers who were cut from the bill.

I am a registered nurse and nurse manager at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center. I have dedicated more than 20 years to caring for individuals with chronic and severe mental illness. I began at the bedside and worked my way into leadership, but I have never stepped away from direct patient care. I continue to respond to emergencies, assist with restraints, intervene in violent incidents, and stand beside my staff when situations escalate.

Mental health nursing has always been my passion. I firmly believe that people with mental illness deserve treatment, dignity, and compassion—not incarceration. Throughout my career, I have taken pride in helping ensure individuals receive care instead of ending up in jail. Those moments when a patient makes progress or regains trust are what keep us committed to this work.

However, the reality has changed. DDPC is increasingly receiving patients directly from jail settings. In correctional facilities, officers can carry weapons, rely on locked cells, and use custody-based safeguards to maintain control. When those same patients arrive at DDPC, those protections are not available. Nurses and mental health workers are expected to manage the same level of aggression and volatility without weapons, without the security infrastructure of a jail, and without the protections correctional staff have. When violence occurs, it is our bodies that absorb it.

I am also a military veteran with 15 years of service, including two deployments to a war zone. I never imagined I would compare my civilian nursing career to my military service, but there are days when the hypervigilance and constant awareness of threat feel painfully familiar. We walk onto the unit knowing violence is not simply possible—it is likely.

I have been verbally, emotionally, and physically assaulted while doing my job. I have been threatened repeatedly, and so have my coworkers. I have had my clothes ripped, my hair pulled, and I have sustained back and shoulder injuries while restraining patients to prevent harm to others. I have witnessed staff members punched, kicked, and choked. These incidents are not isolated—they are part of the daily risk we accept to keep patients and the public safe.

The impact of this work does not end when our shift does. The trauma follows us home. It affects our sleep, our physical health, our emotional well-being, and our families. The cumulative toll of decades in this environment is real. Many of us carry chronic pain, anxiety, and stress that does not simply disappear.

And yet, we continue to show up. We show up because our patients need us. We show up because our coworkers depend on each other for safety. We show up because we believe in the mission of Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center and in protecting our communities. But commitment should not require sacrificing our long-term health and future security.

The 1998 Special Plan is not a privilege—it is recognition of the physical danger, repeated trauma, and emotional strain endured by mental health workers over decades of service. It allows experienced professionals to retire with dignity after years of high-risk work and creates opportunities for new professionals to step into these roles.

LD 579 is about fairness and acknowledging the reality of the work we do every day. If Maine depends on mental health workers to stand unarmed between violence and the public, then Maine has a responsibility to ensure we are not left broken, discarded, or forgotten.

I respectfully ask you to use this surplus to fund LD 579 in the supplemental budget and include the workers who were previously excluded.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Amy Chery, RN

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LD 2212

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