



STATE OF MAINE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SPEAKER'S OFFICE
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1315

William D. Pluecker

State Representative
1133 Finntown Road
Warren, ME 04864
(207) 273-3044
Bill.Pluecker@legislature.maine.gov

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and the entire Labor and Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present LD 1424, "An Act to Remove the Age Requirement for Correctional Staff Retirement Under the 1998 Special Plan," to you today. I am Bill Pluecker. I represent House District 44, the towns of Warren, Union, and Hope.

Our Correctional Officers do the unsung work behind the walls of our correctional institutions. Every day they come into contact with people convicted of some of the most serious crimes in our state. They go to work to protect us outside the walls, as well as provide for the safety and security of all the staff and residents of the prisons. Our justice system depends on them just as heavily as the law enforcement officers that we come into contact with on a more regular basis outside the walls.

Despite the intensity of the work and our dependence upon them, their pay is not commensurate with the law enforcement officers outside the walls, and neither are their retirement packages. The average life expectancy of a correctional officer in the US is 59 years old compared to the population at large of 78. Our current law requires that they work 25 years on the job and reach the age of 55 before retiring, leaving them on average four years to enjoy their retirement before death. Our State Police, Marine Patrol, and Game Wardens all currently are eligible for retirement after 25 years of service despite their age. I do not have the exact numbers on Sheriffs and Municipal Police Officers, but many of them also have the chance to retire after 25 years irregardless of age.

This is all true while at the same time we are struggling to fill the positions at our prisons. Young people sign on to start work, go through the training program at the Maine Criminal Justice Academy, begin work in the prisons, and often quit just months after starting. This results in many lock-ins at Maine State Prison that are made necessary just

because of short staffing. In these situations the residents do not have access to their educational time, their jobs at the prison, various therapies, or recreational times. This adds to the anger and frustration of the residents which makes everyone's job more difficult. When new hires are brought online into this atmosphere, it is no wonder that they often do not stay on the job.

My hope with this bill is that by recognizing the tremendous work that these officers do by giving parity with other law enforcement officers, new hires will have a reason to stay on the job. I have spoken casually with various members of management at Maine State Prison, and the feeling is that the retaining some of these new hires and keeping some of the longer term hires that have no intention of staying on till the age of 55, will outweigh the near term loss of the staff who become eligible for retirement earlier in their career. This is good for the staff as well as the residents who will face fewer lock downs and expanded access to programming. This is the programming upon which we all depend for the rehabilitation of the residents of the prisons.

We cannot expect people to go to work day in and day out in stressful, difficult situations and receive less than people doing similar work on the outside. It is not fair. As a society, we often cast a blind eye to the people working in the prisons as well as those living there. If we expect people to be released from the prison and not recidivate, then they must have access to a full host of programs to help them take control of their lives. We must have staff to make this happen. I hope you will join me in supporting these staff who are working tirelessly for our good, and vote this bill through.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any of these questions.