

Testimony of Jeff McCabe
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

In Support of LD 1424, An Act to Remove the Age Requirement for Correctional Staff Retirement Under the 1998 Special Plan, Sponsored by Representative Pluecker

April 19, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Jeff McCabe, Director of Politics and Legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. The Maine Service Employees Association represents over 13,000 workers across the state, including in Corrections.

Throughout all departments of Maine State Government, the State is experiencing a real struggle to recruit and retain employees. State workers feel buried by impossible workloads and cannot keep up. In the Department of Corrections, these issues have been longstanding for years. Continued forced overtime and staffing shortages are increasing health and safety risks for staff and residents. Studies show the health and well-being of corrections workers are directly affected by their work environment and that their life expectancy is reduced because of it.

Across state government, recent estimates show one in six positions in Maine State Government is currently vacant, further exacerbating the workloads and forced overtime of everyone doing the public's work. When you keep trying the same thing repeatedly but are not successful, then why not try a different approach?

Today we are here to ask the committee to consider a different approach to the staffing crisis within the Department of Corrections. We are suggesting moving to a straight 25-years-and-out retirement plan for the Department. This might be a bill the committee needs to work on to get right and could in fact change the ongoing, long-term and chronic issue of staffing within the Department.

In my work, I have encountered many individuals who retired after stressful and demanding jobs, including Law Enforcement, and then reentered the workforce doing less stressful and less physically demanding work.

Long term, this legislation could help with staffing shortages and the increasing cost of overtime.

I want to provide one example of from neighboring state New Hampshire with a slightly better benefit than Maine: <https://www.jobs.corrections.nh.gov/benefits>

"A career in corrections helps you take care of your family and enjoy life. You can have peace of mind that your family will have access to the care they need, when they need it. And with our retirement plan, new hires are still eligible to retire by age 52.5 provided they have completed 25 years of service."

We are respectfully asking the committee to allow MSEA, MainePERS and AFSCME to create updated language upon completion of 25 years of service and irrespective of the age of the member at the time of retirement.

In order to recruit and retain qualified employees, the State of Maine must work to address inequities and fix issues like this. Please support LD 1424 to help address the hardships that Maine workers in the Department of Corrections are experiencing and ensure continuity in the quality public services that Maine people count on.

I am happy to take any questions. Thank you.