



Troy D Jackson
President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony in Support of LD 1760
An Act to Include Certain Crisis Outreach and Crisis Services Workers Under the 1998
Special Plan for Retirement
and LD 1761
An Act to Include Certain Mental Health Workers Under the 1998 Special Plan for
Retirement

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
Wednesday May 3, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Troy Jackson I serve as President of the Maine Senate and proudly represent Aroostook County in the Legislature I am here today to present two bills concerning the Maine Retirement Systems 1998 Special Plan My focus will be on the workers who would benefit from this plan change since MainePERS will discuss the specifics of the plan

I will begin with LD 1760, which deals with Crisis Outreach and Crisis Services Workers who are employees in the Department of Health and Human Services Undoubtedly, this bill looks and sounds familiar to those of you who were on the Labor and Housing Committee last session This is because it was favorably voted out of this Committee, but unfortunately died on the Special Appropriations Table The reason for your support then, and the reason I am asking for your support now, is because of the terrible emotional and physical stress crisis service workers are under while performing their job

Staff of the Crisis Prevention and Intervention Services (CPIS) are on call 24 hours a day and seven days a week in order to assist individuals and providers with support The consumers they assist are adults ages 18 and older who are eligible for developmental disability services or are living in a brain injury waiver home The mobile crisis outreach team goes directly to where the crisis is occurring - while it is occurring As the stirring testimony from last session



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illustrated, there are unforeseeable safety risks in every shift ¹ These workers often work alone and are under both physical and emotional pressures Serious injuries are not unheard of

The staff is trained in crisis stabilization and assessment, but both are extremely difficult in the middle of an uncontrollable outburst Crisis workers provide an enormous public benefit, but the job wears down those who perform it This is the reason I ask you to support these workers who serve adults with disabilities living in community based or residential settings The 1998 Special Plan would allow them to retire with dignity at age 55 with 10 years of service in this field, or with 25 years of covered service

LD 1761, *An Act to Include Certain Mental Health Workers Under the 1998 Special Plan* is similar in its intent, but broader in its scope This bill is an effort to include all mental health workers who give direct care to consumers regardless of their location It includes those who provide care to residents or patients of mental health institutions in the State, as well as residential and community based settings These workers dedicate their lives to ensuring professional care They endure high pressure jobs that take a significant toll on their well-being They too should be afforded the right to retire when they have the physical and emotional aptitude to enjoy the fruits of their labor

According to a Yale study, chronic stress exacerbates physical health problems, such as increased risk for heart attack, diabetes, and post-traumatic stress disorder It can also affect one's DNA level, which accelerates a person's biological clock LDs 1760 and 1761 attempt to help workers who deal with exceptionally stressful workplace situations If we can honor their labor and help alleviate their stress by allowing them to retire while they still have many years to live, work, and learn, it would be an effort well worth our while That is why I ask you to support both bills and the Mainers who would benefit from them

Finally, a representative from MainePERS indicated that Section 10 in both bills is no longer permitted in federal law Presently, only the employer of a plan can make election changes Therefore, I ask you to amend both bills by eliminating Section 10

¹ http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/get.cfm?bill_id=148841 *State House (207) 287-1500 * Toll (207) 436-0913 * Fax (207) 287-5953 * 1-800-423-6900 * TTY 711*
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I thank you for your time and consideration I am happy to answer any questions you may have, although I am confident there are others with personal experience and expertise who are willing to share their stories