



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Senator Pinny Beebe- Center Representative Suzanne Salisbury and members of the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee

Today I wish to address the concerns of the state of our Corrections Officers and the need to create parity regarding pay and retirement qualifications. Under current conditions, our correction officers starting pay is close to \$5 an hour under that of other state public safety jobs. It is also my understanding that the average age of a correction officer is 56 years of age. Meaning, that only one year after their retirement from a career serving, mentoring, and rehabilitation of those incarcerated within the State prison system CO's will only enjoy 1 year of retirement before passing. I would also like to propose that we change the current retirement system for CO's. Currently the system is set at 25 years of service and minimum age of 55 to retire. I would like to ask the committee to consider changing to the current State Police system, which is 20 years of service with no age restriction to be able to retire. These changes will encourage and promote a viable workforce recruitment and retention for our correctional system.

There is currently a severe and chronic shortage of corrections officers in our State. This shortage has resulted in mandatory overtime for current correction officers, which has resulted in lower morale and serious safety issues, not only at the correctional facilities but for the corrections officers personally. These deficiencies not only affect staff it also limits the rehabilitation of our inmates for who they serve and protect. Our inmates even though being detained for the punishment of their crimes, are in the state's custody to be hopefully rehabilitated and reintroduced as productive members of Maine's society. As we currently sit, the lack of staff has led to the lock down of inmates for sometimes up to 23 hours a day. From eating meals in their cell and lack of much needed socialization and conflict resolution. I am afraid our state is not doing our job to provide the skills needed for these individuals to successfully re-enter society when their time arrives. This leads to even more cost and strain to the taxpayers of Maine. If reintroduction of inmates into society fails, it hurts not only those affected by their crimes, it also affects all taxpayers.

In Summary, my bill requires the rate of pay for corrections officers working in state correctional facilities, including the Long Creek Youth Development Center, to equal the rate of pay for law enforcement officers in the Department of Public Safety, Bureau of State Police. This bill would also bring a much needed benefit of lowering the retirement requirement from 25 years of service and minimum age of 55 to a much needed and deserved 20 years of service and no age requirement to match the Department of Public Safety and Bureau of State Police. With the facts that Correction Officers life expectancy is 56 this part of the proposed bill should be a no-brainer.

District 141 Sanford (part), Springvale, (part) Shapleigh and Newfield

I thank the committee today and remind you of the important role these special and dedicated individuals play in the success of our incarcerated being reintroduced and succeeding in our society

Thank you and I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have