

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs committee for hearing our testimony regarding LD2214. My name is Meghan Cookson, and I have worked for the State of Maine for almost 2 years. Prior to starting at the Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), I was a dispatcher for the Maine State Police for a year. On October 25th, 2023, when the Lewiston Mass Casualty happened, I immediately thought of my fellow first responders. I can imagine it was one of the worst days of their career. The worst day of my career in dispatch was December 10th, 2022.

On December 10th, 2022, 4 students at Maine Maritime Academy tragically lost their lives when the car they were traveling in left the roadway and erupted into flames. These students were the same age as me. Few things are more heartbreaking than having to explain to family members that their loved one has to be identified through DNA. I now have those tough conversations with families every day.

When a mass casualty happens in another state, their first thought is probably not “how am I going to pay for 19 autopsies, 19 transports, 19 toxicology reports, and near around the clock overtime?” But that was an immediate concern for this office. According to a report from the Department of Justice, the average budget for a State Medical Examiner's Office was \$5.8 million dollars in 2018. Our budget of \$2.6 million dollars was less than half the average, and that was 6 years ago.

The Lewiston Mass Casualty Event should have broken our office. We had more victims than we have employees, there are 12 of us for the entire state. Despite being underfunded and understaffed, we got the job done, and showed the utmost professionalism in doing so.

When I transferred from dispatch to the OCME, I foolishly assumed that we too qualified for Maine's 1998 Special Retirement plan. When the Lewiston Mass Casualty began to unfold, people began calling 911; dispatch answers the call, they have special retirement. Maine State Police responded to the scene; they have special retirement. Evidence is collected and taken to the Crime Lab; they have special retirement. The deceased are then transported to OCME for autopsy, but we don't have special retirement?

My colleagues have been fighting for you to fund LD610 for three years now, which would allow OCME to take part in Maine's 1998 Special Retirement plan. I am happy to join in that fight; all we are asking for is equality.

If the state can find 6 million dollars to “provide[s] one-time funding to provide support to victims of crimes,” (page A-85) I struggle to understand why you can't find \$370,404 dollars to support those who determine the cause of death of said victims of crime.



131st MAINE LEGISLATURE

LD 610

LR 377(02)

An Act to Expand the 1998 Special Retirement Plan to Include Employees Who Work for the Office of Chief Medical Examiner

Fiscal Note for Bill as Amended by Committee Amendment " "

Committee: Labor and Housing

Fiscal Note Required: Yes

Fiscal Note

	FY 2023-24	FY 2024-25	Projections FY 2025-26	Projections FY 2026-27
Net Cost (Savings)				
General Fund	\$370,404	\$33,191	\$34,386	\$35,624
Appropriations/Allocations				
General Fund	\$370,404	\$33,191	\$34,386	\$35,624
Federal Expenditures Fund	\$923	\$1,244	\$1,289	\$1,335

Fiscal Detail and Notes

This bill includes General Fund appropriations of \$370,404 in fiscal year 2023-24 and \$33,191 in fiscal year 2024-25 and Federal Expenditures Fund allocations of \$923 in fiscal year 2023-24 and \$1,244 in fiscal year 2024-25 for the costs of allowing employees of the Office of Chief Medical Examiner to participate in the 1998 Special Plan. Of these amounts, a one-time General Fund appropriation of \$346,502 in fiscal year 2023-24 is provided to the Retirement System - Retirement Allowance Fund within the Maine Public Employees Retirement System for the unfunded actuarial liability created as a result of allowing service retirement benefits for these employees earned under the regular state employee and teacher plan to be calculated under the 1998 Special Plan. Additionally, ongoing General Fund appropriations of \$23,902 and \$33,191 and Federal Expenditures Fund allocations of \$923 and \$1,244 in fiscal years 2023-24 and 2024-25, respectively, is provided to the Office of Chief Medical Examiner within the Department of the Attorney General for the prospective costs of moving the positions to the 1998 Special Plan effective October 1, 2023.

	2023-24	2024-25
Summary - FEDERAL EXPENDITURES FUND		
All Other	1,182	1,185
	48,755	48,871
Summary - OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS		
Positions - LEGISLATIVE COUNT	-1,000	-1,000
Personal Services	(9,208)	(110,958)
All Other	(2,372)	(11,329)
	(11,580)	(122,287)

CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER - OFFICE OF 0412
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	2023-24	2024-25
Initiative: Provides one-time funding for unanticipated costs resulting from the Lewiston mass casualty event in October 2023.		
GENERAL FUND		
Personal Services	11,607	
All Other	16,500	
	28,107	0
Initiative: Provides funding for continuation of a pilot for premium overtime, callout and standby pay for the Medical Examiner Assistants in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner.		
GENERAL FUND		
Personal Services	63,772	65,105
	63,772	65,105
Initiative: Provides funding to reflect salary stipends currently authorized by contract or Human Resources Memo.		
GENERAL FUND		
Personal Services	277,394	200,300
	277,394	200,300
Summary - GENERAL FUND	2023-24	2024-25
Personal Services	352,773	265,405
All Other	16,500	
	369,273	265,405

DISTRICT ATTORNEYS SALARIES 0409

	2023-24	2024-25
Initiative: Provides headcount for 2 Assistant District Attorney positions to correct an error in Public Law 2023, chapter 412.		
GENERAL FUND		
Positions - LEGISLATIVE COUNT	2,000	2,000
	2,000	2,000
Summary - GENERAL FUND	2023-24	2024-25
Positions - LEGISLATIVE COUNT	2,000	2,000
	2,000	2,000

PURCHASED SOCIAL SERVICES 0228

Initiative: Provides one-time funding to provide support to victims of crimes.

OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS

All Other		6,000,000
Total	0	6,000,000

Summary - OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS

All Other		6,000,000
Total	0	6,000,000

RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT FACILITIES ASSESSMENT Z197

Initiative: Adjusts funding in the Medicaid dedicated tax accounts and the corresponding General Fund accounts to align resources with the December 2023 Revenue Forecasting Committee recommendations.

OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS

All Other	223,000	223,000
Total	223,000	223,000

Summary - OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS

All Other	223,000	223,000
Total	223,000	223,000

RIVERVIEW PSYCHIATRIC CENTER Z219

Initiative: Adjusts funding for positions in the Riverview Psychiatric Center as a result of the decrease in the 2025 Federal Medical Assistance Percentage. The blended rate is 62.21% Federal Expenditures Fund and 37.79% General Fund in fiscal year 2024-25.

OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS

Personal Services		(162,718)
All Other		(4,995)
Total	0	(167,713)

Summary - OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS

Personal Services		(162,718)
All Other		(4,995)
Total	0	(167,713)

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES 0138

Initiative: Provides funding for opioid abatement through harm reduction, treatment, prevention and/or recovery support in accordance with the approved uses in the Maine State-Subdivision Memorandum of Understanding and Agreement Regarding Use of Settlement Funds.

MAINE RECOVERY FUND

All Other	362,500	1,450,000
Total	362,500	1,450,000

Summary - MAINE RECOVERY FUND

All Other	362,500	1,450,000
Total	362,500	1,450,000