

Testimony in Support of LD 240

Good morning, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 240, *An Act to Create Consistency in Retirement Service Benefits Deferral Under the Maine Public Employees Retirement System*.

I regret that I am unable to testify in person today, as I am an interviewer for new employee candidates at the Office of the State Fire Marshal, where I am currently employed as a Senior Fire Investigator.

My name is Isaiah Peppard, and I am a resident of the Town of Farmingdale and testifying as an individual not representing my employer.

I am writing in strong support of this bill, as it significantly impacts my retirement.

From 2002 to 2013, I served as a police officer for the City of Gardiner. For 11 years, I was a dedicated public servant, committed to protecting those who lived, worked, and visited the city. In 2013, I achieved a long-standing career goal by accepting a position as a Fire Investigator with the Maine Office of the State Fire Marshal. While this transition marked a professional milestone, it does not diminish the pride and dedication I had during my time serving Gardiner.

However, I later discovered that under the current retirement system, I will be required to begin collecting all state retirement benefits as soon as I become eligible for retirement from state service. Because I did not complete the full 25-year plan (which has no age requirement) while employed by the City of Gardiner, my service there defaults to the standard state retirement plan, which includes an age requirement of 60.

I will be eligible to retire from state service at age 53. However, because I have not yet reached the age of 60, my Gardiner retirement benefit will be penalized at a rate of 6% per year for the seven years between my retirement eligibility and age 60. This results in a 42% reduction in my earned retirement benefit from my time with the City of Gardiner. I now face a significant and unjust financial penalty. This bill will allow me to leave my earned benefits from Gardiner until I reach my normal retirement age and collect it at that time without penalty. This costs the retirement system nothing but spares me the 42% penalty in earned benefits for transitioning to State service.

I believe this is fundamentally unfair. I served honorably, protecting and serving my community, and because I pursued my career goal of becoming an investigator for the State Fire Marshal's Office, I now face a significant and unjust financial penalty.

I urge you to support and pass this bill, which will allow me to defer my Gardiner retirement benefit until I reach the appropriate age, ensuring that I receive the full benefit I have rightfully earned.

I want to extend my gratitude to Senator Hickman for sponsoring this important legislation and to the committee for considering it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.