

**Testimony of Beth White**  
**Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989**  
**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing**

**In Support of LD 137, An Act to Expand the 1998 Special Retirement Plan To Include Employees Who Work for the Office of Chief Medical Examiner, Sponsored by Senator Hickman**

**February 12, 2025, Cross Office Building Room 202, and Electronically**

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, I'm Beth White, 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 public sector and publicly funded workers across the state, including workers in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner within the Maine Office of Attorney General. We're here in support of LD 137.

We appreciate the re-introduction of this legislation on behalf of the workers in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. The issue of who is currently included in the 1998 Special Plan and who is currently excluded from it is a real one. It impacts many public servants in our Great State of Maine, and it must be addressed immediately for the State to recruit and retain qualified workers. We also appreciate this committee's diligence on this overall issue. Over the past few years, members of this committee have heard testimony from other state workers seeking inclusion in the 1998 Special Plan. Many of you supported legislation to move the State Police Crime Lab and the Computer Crimes Unit within the Maine Department of Public Safety into a special plan, which was successfully passed and funded in 2023. Their inclusion in a special plan is due to the exceedingly difficult work they do in service to Maine people.

LD 137, the subject of this hearing, is similar in intent, but it seeks to include in the 1998 Special Plan another group of State employees: those who work in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. Like their colleagues in the State Police Crime Lab and in the Computer Crimes Unit, the workers in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner also do exceedingly difficult work in their service to all Maine people. The job of these workers is to work with the bodies of death victims and to be in contact with their families. This is traumatic work that not only impacts them in their professional lives, but in their personal lives as well. Today, you will hear from some of these workers directly. It's past time for them to become eligible for the Special Plan. During the 131<sup>st</sup> Legislative Session, identical legislation known as LD 610 was passed with bipartisan support in this committee, under the hammer in both chambers, and was funded off of the Special Appropriations Table in a bipartisan vote. Unfortunately, it was not signed into law and died in the House chamber on the last day of session. We respectfully ask this Committee to make passing LD 137 a priority, and ask for your support in lobbying Appropriations to ensure it is funded.

Passing LD 137 would be an important step toward showing the workers in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner the respect they have earned. I've attached the bill language and fiscal note from last session for your information as well; as you can see, the fiscal note is very reasonable for legislation that triggers the Unfunded Actuarial Liability (UAL). In the past, we have seen bills similar to this be funded by department resources or even special revenue sources. This bill is prime for receiving funding from settlement funds via the Office of the Maine Attorney General or other financial resources. We ask you all to be creative and are more than happy to work with the Committee and/or the Department on

creative solutions to ensure this legislation is passed and funded this session. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.