

Testimony in Support of
LD 355, ““An Act to Advance the Maine Retirement Savings Program”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services
April 10, 2025

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and esteemed members of the Committee on Health Care, Insurance and Financial Services. My name is Eloise Vitelli, I live in Arrowsic and I am here to speak in strong support of LD 355 and in clear opposition to LD 344 and LD 1283.

I spent most of my entire career in the Legislature – 8+ years, working to advance what we now call the Maine Retirement Investment Trust. It took several tries, many conversations with supporters, skeptics, and adversaries and in the end, we succeeded in passing a bipartisan bill to support working Mainers save for a more secure future.

I want to thank Senator Bailey for sponsoring LD 355 and Director Bordowitz and her dedicated Board of Directors, for their persistence in implementing the Trust. The recommendations contained in this bill (LD355)) are in line with the goals we had from the beginning – making retirement savings easily available especially to the small business owners and their employees that fuel so much of our economy.

The need for this opportunity was clear from the beginning: in 2012, the National Institute for Retirement Security reported less than half of Maine workers participated in a retirement plan. As recently as last year, 2024, a national survey by the Institute found that the vast majority of Americans across the political spectrum (81 % of R's, 78% of D's and 79% of I's) reported being worried about their own retirement security.

As someone who has twice retired, I am grateful for the retirement savings made available to me by my employers that allowed me to concentrate on my work, knowing that I was contributing to a more secure future with every paycheck without having to worry about it. The fact that MERIT is structured as 'opt out' is an important feature of what makes this work for workers.

It can take time for new ideas to take hold, to get the word out, to polish the mechanics and get the details right. We knew that successful implementation would take effort and a willingness on the part of employers and employees to try something new. I am reminded of my favorite quote attributed to Samuel Clemens: “I'm all for progress, its change I don't like.” While there is no denying that MERIT represents change, I would argue that the fact that in little over of year of full operation, 12,500 working Mainers have saved over \$10 Million dollars is a sign of real progress. I could not be prouder of the businesses and employees who have taken advantage of this opportunity to save for their future.

One last point: in 2019 – 6 years ago, the average SS payment for retirees in Maine was \$1100/mo. Today the average is \$1980.86 though it should be noted the gender difference

provides \$2283 for men versus only \$1845 on average for women. Social Security remains an important part of what is often described as the three-legged stool of retirement income: earnings, savings and SSN.

I urge members of this committee to support the continuation of MERIT by passing LD 355 and rejecting the other bills before you.