



Mike Tipping
Senator, District 8

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Representative Roeder and fellow members of the Labor Committee,

My name is Mike Tipping, I represent Senate District 8 and it is my honor to introduce LD 2067, An Act to Include Certain Community Mental Health Workers Under the 1998 Special Plan for Retirement.

This is a familiar title and it seeks to address a familiar issue for this committee over the past several years; allowing state mental health workers who do difficult and sometimes dangerous work to retire with dignity at a reasonable age.

This is an issue that this committee has consistently declared to be one of its top concerns and priorities. I am deeply grateful for that strong, bipartisan support and I take it very seriously. I'm proud that we were able to work together to pass LD 579 and get funding to extend retirement benefits for some of these workers in the budget last year.

This bill seeks to help those workers who, in the compromise and curtailment that we're all familiar with in our legislative work, have still been left behind.

Originally, the legislation we considered last year included all state mental health workers, including community response workers and direct care staff at Riverview and Dorethea Dix. What we passed and got funded covered some institutional workers, but not those who do the important and dangerous work of community response. These are the workers from whom we'll hear today.

The 1998 Special Retirement Plan currently covers workers in a variety of high-stress occupations, including law enforcement officers, firefighters, pilots, liquor inspectors and emergency response workers.

It allows them to retire with dignity at age 55 with 10 years of service in this field or 25 years of covered service.

Over the past few years, this committee and the Government Oversight Committee, which opened an investigation last year, have heard heartbreaking testimony from mental health workers and solid arguments why the support we're contemplating is necessary for current workers to continue to do these jobs and for us as a state to recruit new staff to do this work.

You know the arguments, and I'll allow those here today to speak for themselves, except to say that I hope we continue to show the same support our committee always has.

I believe that we should continue our incremental approach to cover these workers, and with the new revenue expectations, now is a good time for us to take this next step. I appreciate your consideration of this bill.