

DATE: January 31, 2026

TO: Senator Tipping, Senate Chair
Representative Roeder, House Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Labor

FROM: Rick Cailler Professional Firefighters of Maine

SUBJECT: Re: LD 2169

An Act to Improve the Public Employees Disability Retirement Program by Modifying Provisions Controlling the Reduction of Benefits and Clarifying Terminology

Good afternoon, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor. My name is Rick Cailler and I am a Lewiston Firefighter and a member of MainePERS Advisory Committee representing the Professional Firefighters of Maine. I have been a firefighter in the city of Lewiston since 1987 and have served on the MainePERS Advisory Committee since 2011.

I would like to offer this letter of support of L.D. 2169 which would lead to substantial improvements to the current disability retirement program for members of the retirement system who are found to be permanently impaired from performing their current occupation.

As part of my services to the Professional Firefighters of Maine I assist injured members who can no longer perform the essential functions of being a firefighter due to a physical, mental illness or injury and are medically determined to have suffered a permanent incapacity.

The process to arrive at a permanent incapacity is not immediate and requires in-depth analysis of the condition the applicant may suffer from. While the application process is sort is the final leg of the journey for the applicant the back story is always much more complicated and personal. Often times the member is suffering from medical conditions that are life changing, their chosen occupation is going away, but the untold story is the applicant embarks on a journey of the unknown future.

The reality that a career has come to an end and the unfamiliar and ensuing physical, mental and financial realities now come forward. All these changes are not only impacting the injured but the entire family. There will be more questions than answers for the foreseeable future.

As the program is explained the member learns of the financial restrictions (*penalties*) the current system requires and its impacts on both member and family who just want to try and rebuild their unexpected new lives. During the application process life is on hold, currently as the program stands their financially lives will never be the same regardless of approval or denial. The changes that this bill brings forward allows a measure of relief in terms of earning capacity over the current program and a step forward for the injured.

Disability programs are a safety net and were never intended to be a way of life or a golden parachute. As this program is currently structured the financial restrictions and benefits can be seen as somewhat punitive or less than equitable because they are ill or injured. Every successful applicant of this program is someone who can no longer return to their chosen career. Thankfully MainePERS recognized that the disability program should be better and a member's best interest needs to be part of the reasons for a decision. LD2169 is one of those times in which a large organization is making the right choice. Creating equitable and sustainable improvements to the disability program demonstrates the goodwill on the part of MainePERS leadership, they should be applauded and supported for their efforts to make these changes. The changes via this legislation will result in a more compassionate disability program. Please lend your support to the passage of LD2169.

Respectfully

Rick Cailler