



**Testimony of Beth White  
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989**

**On LD 2212, An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027  
Sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
10am Tuesday, February 17, 2026, State House Room 228 and Electronically**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, I'm Beth White, Director of Politics & Legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. We are a labor union representing over 13,000 Maine workers, including workers at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

We strongly support the proposal to allocate almost \$4 million in funding for the establishment of a youth psychiatric residential treatment facility (Page A-66). This proposal will help address the issue of children being placed in hotels and emergency departments, which often stems from the lack of long-term placements and solutions for children. Our members have been raising concerns about the wait times between when some children are discharged from acute care, such as a hospital emergency department, to when a bed is available in a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF). There simply are not enough PRTF beds to meet current needs, which is why we strongly support this proposed funding.

We would also respectfully ask this committee to include funding to move the remaining Riverview Psychiatric Center (RPC) and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center (DDPC) workers

into the 1998 Special Plan in this supplemental budget. This plan allows workers to retire at age 55 with 25 years of service in recognition of the fact that workers eligible for the plan have high risk, stressful and often traumatic jobs. We are thankful that last year, this committee included funding to move Mental Health Worker 1-4's at these facilities into the special retirement plan, which we strongly supported. However, there are many other positions at Riverview and Dorothea Dix who work with patients alongside the Mental Health Workers, and unfortunately, those positions were not included. I will provide the Committees with a list of the excluded positions, but it includes nurses, psychiatrists, acuity specialists, intensive case managers, and so many others who work with patients on a regular basis. This has created an inequity in retirements among workers at RPC & DDPC, where some workers can retire at age 55 under the Special Plan, but others must work until either age 62 or 65. Across job classifications, workers at RPC & DDPC often encounter mental, verbal, and physical abuse while at work, facing higher likelihoods of on-the-job injuries. All workers at these facilities deserve to be in the special plan, not just mental health workers. Please include funding to move the remaining classifications into the 1998 plan in the final supplemental budget proposal. I have attached my testimony from LD 579, which remains on the Special Appropriations Table; its original, non-amended language would move all workers at RPC & DDPC into the 1998 plan.

We look forward to working with you, your fellow members of the 132<sup>nd</sup> Legislature, and the administration to develop and pass a supplemental state budget that truly meets the needs of all Maine people. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

**Testimony of Beth White  
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989**

**In Support of LD 579, An Act to Include Certain Mental Health Workers Under the  
1998 Special Plan for Retirement, Sponsored by Senator Mike Tipping**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing  
10:30 AM Wednesday, March 12, 2025, Cross Building Room 202**

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. We are a labor union representing over 13,000 Maine workers, including workers at the Maine Department of Health and Services, which encompasses Riverview Psychiatric Center and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center. We are here in support of LD 579.

Mental health workers and their colleagues at Dorothea Dix and Riverview do challenging and physically demanding work, often under dangerous conditions. The vision statement for Riverview states, "Riverview Psychiatric Center, in collaboration with the community, will be a center for best practice, treatment, education, and research for individuals with serious and persistent mental illness and co-occurring disorders." Workers at Dorothea Dix and Riverview often encounter mental, verbal and physical abuse while at work, and face a higher likelihood of on-the-job injuries. The patients they work with are often at risk of harming themselves or others, so workers must remain constantly aware of their surroundings to keep both themselves and their patients safe. We encourage you to read the written testimony submitted by workers in the last legislative session in support of similar legislation; they spoke the difficult nature of their work.

As many of you are aware, the 1998 Special Plan allows workers to retire at age 55 with 25 years of service. The workers eligible for this special plan do work that is high risk, stressful and often traumatic. Moving other workers doing similar jobs into the 1998 Special Plan would be an incentive to not only hire new workers, but also to retain the talented and experienced workers currently employed. It would also show thanks and appreciation to the Mainers who do these incredibly difficult jobs.

Understaffing and vacancies at our two psychiatric hospitals have been recurring problems for years, and it's past time that they are addressed. A Bangor Daily News article in 2023 reported that nearly 1 in 6 Maine state jobs are unfilled with over 2,100 vacancies at the time. These vacancies have impacted Riverview Psychiatric Center and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center as well. The problem of understaffing due to vacancies continues to this

day. According to data provided by the Executive Branch as of November 2024:

- **Riverview Psychiatric Center:** 51 positions, or 25% of the 204 MSEA-SEIU-represented permanent and limited period positions at Riverview, were vacant as of November 2024. That's actually an improvement from April 2024 when 64 of 204 MSEA-represented positions were vacant, for a 31% vacancy rate. Because of such a high vacancy rate, staff at Riverview have been regularly forced into unsafe encounters with patients. This has frequently led to violent assaults on staff—often with life-changing consequences, including severe traumatic brain injuries.
- **Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center:** 8.5% vacancy rate for MSEA-represented permanent and limited period full-time positions as of November 2024. While this is an improvement from April 2024 when the vacancy rate was at 16%, all of these vacancies at both Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center and Riverview Psychiatric Center need to be filled immediately to ensure quality services and both staff and patient safety.

When positions remain unfilled, it not only makes work more challenging for those who remain, but for workers in these facilities it can also make their jobs more dangerous. Maintaining staffing levels is critical across all sectors of state government. Open positions have included nurses, psychiatrists, mental health workers, and psychologists, among others.

This is clearly difficult and dangerous work, yet the State has consistently fallen short when it comes to respecting, protecting and paying these workers fairly for their labor. I'd like to draw your attention to the State's most recent [State of Maine Market Pay Report, dated Sept. 30, 2024](#), which puts the state employee pay gap at 14%. Again, this is the State's own study. [Please also see the related memo](#) that we presented to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee on Oct. 8, 2024, detailing our response to the State's Market Pay Report dated Sept. 30, 2024. As you may know, on average, State employees in 2020 made 15% less than their counterparts throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional pay differences, according to the [State of Maine Market Study Report](#) dated Nov. 20, 2020, so there was only progress made of 1% in closing the pay gap between those two studies.

Fortunately LD 579 provides a path toward ensuring the recruitment and mental health workers at our state psychiatric hospitals. LD 579 adds employees of Maine DHHS employed on October 1, 2025, or hired thereafter who provide direct care to persons in need of mental health services in a community-based or residential setting or to residents or patients of mental health institutions in this State or have responsibility for providing crisis outreach and crisis services to adults with developmental disabilities or

intellectual disabilities in a community-based or residential setting to the 1998 Special Plan for certain Maine Public Employees Retirement System members.

Adding these workers to the 1998 Special Plan would be a step in the right direction towards ensuring that we are giving them the respect and compensation that they deserve.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.