

Testimony of Beth White
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
and the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation
9am Thursday, February 19, 2026, State House Room 228 and Electronically

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" (Emergency) (Governor's Bill), sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations Committee, Senator Grohoski, Representative Sayre, members of the Taxation Committee, 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, both active and retired. Our members work in all three branches of state government, at nonprofit social service agencies, quasi-governmental agencies, and more.

We are here today to make recommendations for a fair supplemental budget that ensures quality public services for all Maine people and provides state workers with the respect they have earned by long been denied.

Budgets are statements of priorities. Over the course of these budget hearings, you have heard from Mainers about unmet needs across our state and the burden the affordability crisis is creating for so many Maine families and workers. Things are tough right now for so many, including our members. While the proposed supplemental budget contains a number of provisions that will help, such as continuing the free community college program, increasing minimum teacher salaries, investing in housing, and more, there is a lot more that could be done to help Mainers right now.

For years, we have been fighting to close the state employee pay gap. We have been fighting to undo the 2011 MainePERS pension cuts. We have been fighting to ensure workers in physically and mentally demanding jobs have a pension that recognizes their sacrifices at work. Yet we constantly are told that things are "too expensive" to fix, and there's simply "not enough money" to truly address these issues, along with so many others. Our members are frustrated by this ongoing trend where budgets are balanced on their backs while their needs go unmet.

Just last year, the 132nd Maine Legislature and the Mills administration diverted \$56 million away from the Salary Plan, which pays wages of Maine State Government workers, and used that money for other priorities. This raid on the Salary Plan wasn't a one-time occurrence. Throughout the entirety of the Mills administration, the Maine Legislature has diverted money away from the Salary Plan under the veil of raising the attrition rate for state workers, as well as allocating funds from vacancy savings for capital improvements. Members of MSEA-SEIU Local 1989 who work for the Executive Branch of Maine State Government have had enough of hearing that there is no funding to solve the persistent recruitment and retention challenges or to address the state employee pay gap, while at the same time seeing the funding from the vacancies used to solve other problems. The overwhelming reason for these vacancies

is the lack of competitive compensation compared to comparable jobs in municipalities, other state governments in New England, and the private sector. The consequence of these vacancies is more pressure on our members left doing all of the work. Our members are calling on you and your colleagues in the 132nd Maine Legislature to immediately restore the \$56 million taken from it last year, and to do so as part of the budget deliberations on LD 2212.

Rather than continuing to balance the state budget on the backs of state employees and other working Mainers, this Legislature has an opportunity to craft a supplemental state budget that ensures millionaires and large corporations pay their fair share and that those revenues are invested in ways that improve the lives of not only our members, but all Mainers. We ask you to reject wasteful tax giveaways for millionaires and wealthy corporations, and instead, focus on raising progressive revenue to fund our current and future needs.

If we raise progressive revenue, we will have the funding necessary to invest in so many critical programs. We could make real, meaningful progress to close the state employee pay gap (state workers are paid, on average, substantially below both their private and public sector peers). We could begin to undo the 2011 pension cuts, which have cost our retiree members billions of dollars over the last decade. We could ensure that workers at Riverview Psychiatric Center, Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center, and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner are included in the 1998 Special Retirement plan in recognition of the traumatic and difficult work they do every day. We could remove the age requirement so our Military Firefighters at the Bangor International Airport can retire after 25 years of service, like most firefighters across the state.

This Legislature has an opportunity to enact a budget that continues making progress to meet your obligations to working Mainers and their families, and to the people we have pledged to serve and protect. Maine's tax code should ask more of those who benefit the most from our economy, not of working people and the most vulnerable who are already struggling. There are a number of bills already submitted by legislators that would increase revenues, make our tax system fairer, and allow us to avoid unnecessary cuts to essential services. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.