



**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 Veterans and Legal Affairs
1:30pm Tuesday, February 24, 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 Hickman, Representative Supica, members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs 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, including workers at the Maine Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management (DVEM), which includes the military firefighters at the Bangor International Airport.

First, we support the proposed reclasses, reorganizations, and new positions within these sections of the proposed supplemental budget.

We're also here to ask you to please include funding for LD 1236, An Act to Address Employee Retention of State Employees Who Are Firefighters at Bangor International Airport, sponsored by Representative Amy Roeder. This long-overdue legislation establishes a new special retirement plan for military firefighters employed by DVEM at BIA so they can retire after 25 years of service regardless of age. This legislation passed under the hammer in both chambers and is currently on the Special Appropriations Table.

The work performed by the firefighters at BIA is critical for the safety of everyone who flies in or out of BIA. The firefighters at BIA also respond to mutual aid calls in surrounding communities.

At BIA, the firefighters routinely endure exposure to contaminants commonly known as PFAS – per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. Those contaminants are identified as hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants under the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980. As MSEA member Patrick Foley noted in his testimony on LD 1236, “Firefighters often have shorter retirement periods than other professions due to the physically demanding nature of the job and the increased risk of health issues from exposure to hazardous materials and stress, leading to earlier physical decline. Retention of specialized firefighters is important, as many leave to other departments that offer retirement after 25 years of service [regardless of age]”.

This is also an issue of fairness; as fellow MSEA member Jeremiah Jordan noted in his testimony on LD 1236, “we work rotating 24 hour shifts that average 56 hours per week. Many of the neighboring full-time fire departments are working 42-hour work weeks and offering 25-year retirement at any age. Of the last 30 retirements from our Fire Department, 9 were disability retirements.”

Please include funding for LD 1236 in the supplemental budget to ensure that the firefighters at BIA, who put themselves at great personal risk in service to the people of Maine and our great nation, have the ability to retire after 25 years of service regardless of age. It’s the least we can do for these incredibly brave frontline workers – and to help and ensure that the State can recruit and retain firefighters at BIA in the years and decades ahead.

Thank you and I’d be glad to answer any questions.