

**Testimony of Jonathan French, P.E.  
Neither for Nor Against  
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**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and members of the Committee on Transportation, my name is Jonathan French, I live in Hallowell and I am a licensed professional civil engineer in Maine. In May I will have completed 25 years at the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) where I currently serve as the Engineering Data Manager for the Bureau of Project Development. I am here on my own time today to testify neither for nor against LD 2212, but to ask that you create an initiative in LD 2212 and LD 2213 to restore the money in the General and Highway Funds that was taken from the employee salary plans when the attrition rate was increased to 6% in the General Fund and set at 5% in the Highway Fund. This resulted in a loss of approximately \$56 million in the General Fund and \$12.3 million in the Highway Fund salary plans.

The State of Maine has a retention and recruitment crisis, and the solution to that crisis is not to reduce funding and position counts and have the current workforce do more. Nor is the solution to use money that would have gone to positions to outsource this work to the private sector at a higher cost and at a profit from taxpayer dollars. Neither of these are an efficient use of those taxpayer dollars. Instead, the State of Maine needs to protect the investment that has been made in the current state workforce by increasing, not further weakening, retention and recruitment efforts. The Maine Legislature can assist with this effort by providing the necessary resources for the state in its salary plans to be able to properly compensate positions to make them more attractive to prospective employee candidates.

Although my position is funded with the Highway Fund budget (which the Transportation Committee is working on with LD 2213), my observations have been the same as my General Fund-funded peers in their departments. There is constant turnover in positions that requires a need for constant re-training, which is by itself, inefficient. However, what may not be quite as similar is the dependency on consultants. A couple of the duties of my position are management of our project data site, and also maintaining our CADD standards and procedures site for both internal and external use. Both of these sites are

located on Microsoft SharePoint and this cloud service has allowed us to provide access to external consultants.

Since I have made the CADD standards and procedures site accessible in August 2024, I have granted almost 160 individual requests for access to consultant staff. For comparison, the entire Bureau of Project Development itself has just over 300 filled positions. So that's a number of consultants that is over half the entire Bureau staff that has been working just on project development for the department and all at a higher wage rate than project development staff of the department, not including profit and overhead costs as well. I also keep getting weekly requests for individual access to add to this total, and the management for consultant access to projects has also become a weekly occurrence, if not daily. For the newer requests, these aren't consultants that work in Maine either, rather states like New Hampshire, New York and even Texas. This reliance on external and out-of-state consultants simply is not an efficient, nor sustainable option, yet the department has been forced into this position because it cannot retain nor recruit enough qualified staff to handle the work.

There are also quite a few names that I've recognized as former department employees, some who retired, and some who just left for better compensation but still plan to be actively working for decades to come. In the case of all of these former employees, companies are now taking advantage of their taxpayer-funded training and skills to profit from the taxpayer dollars funding MaineDOT projects.

So it's now time to ask the question: do we want to continue to be so reliant on the private sector to deliver state services at whatever profit margin they desire? I would hope the answer to that question would be "no."

The alternative is attempting to retain a core workforce with the competency and skills that are needed to provide quality public services and protect that investment that taxpayers have made in the current state workforce. Restoring money to the salary plans will give the state the ability to make that attempt by being able to provide better compensation for the positions it needs to retain and also for the positions that it needs to fill. Therefore, I strongly urge the two Committees to create this salary plan restoration initiative in both LD 2212 and LD 2213 to give the State of Maine the means it needs to retain and recruit a state government workforce that can consistently provide quality and cost-effective services for the public good.