

**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 Marine Resources**  
**2pm Wednesday, 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 Tepler, Representative Hepler, members of Marine Resources 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 Department of Marine Resources and all three branches of state government.

We're here today to testify neither for nor against LD 2212, the Governor's proposed Supplemental Budget, and 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 but long been denied.

First, we support the reclassifications in this portion of the supplemental budget. While these initiatives are much appreciated, it's important to note that this budget fails to make progress on closing the well-documented state employee pay gap, which has contributed to understaffing and recruitment and retention challenges within the Department of Marine Resources and all of Maine State Government.

According to data provided by the Executive Branch, as of April 2024, DMR had 28 vacancies for a vacancy rate of 16%. While the number of vacant positions at DMR dropped to 22 as of November 2024, for a vacancy rate of 12.5%, all of these vacancies need to be filled immediately to ensure quality services at DMR.

During the last legislative session, workers for DMR testified how understaffing has impacted their duties and outlook of their department. As one of our members who works as a Marine Resource Specialist II stated in testimony on February 8, 2024, "Life as a Maine State Employee working in West Boothbay Harbor in 2024, requires most employees to live out of the local community and 'off peninsula', including myself, driving 45 minutes one way to the office from a slightly more affordable Bath housing market. The mismatch between State compensation and the housing costs has impacted recruitment and retention, with staff resources spent on searches that result in zero or limited applicants, restricting the ability to attract applicants that would maximize program performance. Single program staffing deficiencies have secondary impacts because State Government is so interconnected. The Administrative Staff positions in the West Boothbay Office are only recently fully staffed as of fall 2023 for the first time in at least 3 years. The most senior of these positions has cycled through 3 hires in that time... In the interim, administrative tasks were shouldered by science staff in addition to their own responsibilities, stressing the human resources meant to serve the Maine people through their respective programs. The

State investment in onboarding positions with high turnover is also substantial, impacting the ability of the State to function as intended. An understaffed financial office also impacts the ability to purchase required equipment, process contracts and invoices, and meet external reporting deadlines within our department. These examples underscore the pervasiveness of the understaffing issue and how, even if one program is fully staffed, its ability to serve the Maine people to its best ability can still be hamstrung.”

In addition, marine-resources positions elsewhere, including those that are funded by grants, often are more narrow-focused than some DMR positions, yet all pay better than the State’s wages. Our DMR workers believe that employment with the State shouldn’t be a last resort for qualified job seekers in Maine. DMR workers and all other state employees shouldn’t have to live on the financial edge of affordable housing where they work, and they shouldn’t have to continually perform duties beyond their positions due to chronic and persistent vacancies.

In 2025, the 132<sup>nd</sup> Maine Legislature and the Mills administration in 2025 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, and the consequences of these vacancies is more pressure on our members left doing all of the work, including workers at DHHS. Our members are calling on you and your colleagues in the 132<sup>nd</sup> 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.

This scheme of increasing the state employee attrition rate to raid the Salary Plan has worsened the recruitment and retention problem throughout Maine State Government, including at DMR. Understaffing throughout all state departments remains a serious problem often with devastating consequences on both state workers and Maine people who rely on their services.

Yet in the wake of the repeated raids on the Salary Plan throughout the Mills administration, the administration now claims it cannot afford anything more than a pair of 2% pay raises for the Executive Branch workers whom we represent. When they made this claim, they specifically cited the impact of the higher attrition rate on the Salary Plan as a reason why. Our members in the Executive Branch have been working without new contracts since July 1, 2025 – that’s over seven months. The proposed pay raises from the Mills administration would widen, not shrink, the state employee pay gap because they would put state workers further behind the cost of living. That’s inexcusable.

It’s not too late for the 132<sup>nd</sup> Maine Legislature and Governor Mills to do the right thing. As you review the Governor’s supplemental budget, please make the frontline staff – who carry out the laws and

programs passed by the Legislature – a priority by dedicating surplus state revenues to help close the state employee pay gap. We recognize there are opportunities in this legislative session to generate revenue to meet such unmet needs, so we also respectfully ask that you show leadership in ensuring that the State of Maine has the revenues necessary for state workers to do their jobs. A failure to act will only make the problem harder and more expensive to solve, and the consequences more tragic. The time is now. Thank you and I'd be glad to answer any questions.