

Testimony of Jeff McCabe  
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989

**In Opposition to LD 1916, An Act to Classify Meat and Poultry Products Inspections as Essential Services**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.  
May 22, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I'm Jeff McCabe, 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. We are opposed to LD 1916.

I want to recognize we understand the intent of this bill and understand why the sponsor is bringing it forward. We also understand the key support that these state employees provide to Maine businesses. This is not the first time this session this issue has been raised but the Department has also requested time to develop a solution.

Our opposition today is due in part as spelled out in the Department's testimony; the administration has the authority to designate essential employees. We also oppose this bill at this time because the Department, under the leadership of Commissioner Beal, has committed to working toward a solution to this issue. We think the Department's approach is the best approach at this time because the Department clearly wants to involve the workers and those who supervise them in the process and in the planning.

Across this committee's jurisdiction, Natural Resource Agencies are struggling to recruit and retain staff. Workload and wages are two key issues. We strongly caution you to approach issues like this strategically. One in six state positions already are currently vacant <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/03/27/politics/maine-state-jobs-unfilled-snow-fighter-caseworkers-joam40zk0w/>. Involving workers in key decisions such as the issue raised in LD 1916 is important to finding solutions and ensuring key details are not missed. We have seen in recent years the Legislature make changes affecting workloads or schedules; this can create unintended consequences that have caused workers to transfer to other positions or leave state service.

**Some options we encourage this committee to consider:**

- Vote ought not to pass;
- Establish an hourly stipend for these positions to ensure the workers are compensated for these changes or establish standby pay for those inspectors covering during state closures;
- Provide funding for these positions to be reclassified recognizing this additional responsibility;
- Another approach is the committee could carry this bill over and take it up if the Department does not come up with a solution or coverage.

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