

TESTIMONY OF BREENA BISSELL

DIRECTOR, STATE OF MAINE BUREAU OF HUMAN RESOURCES

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

PROVIDING INFORMATION REGARDING:

L.D. 271, *“An Act to Recruit and Retain Department of Corrections Facilities Support Staff”*

SPONSORED BY: Representative Pluecker

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Hearing date: February 22, 2021

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. I am Breena Bissell, Director of the State of Maine Bureau of Human Resources. I am here to testify neither for nor against LD 271 and provide you with information that the Department of Administrative and Financial Services hopes you will find beneficial as you consider this bill.

LD 271 seeks to require staff in support, maintenance and other nonsupervisory positions in correctional facilities maintained by the Department of Corrections be given a \$2 per hour increase in their rate of pay commiserate with the \$2 per hour increase negotiated for guards in 2016.

We certainly understand the desire to affect through legislation the compensation of our hard-working employees serving in these difficult jobs. However, we would recommend in the immediate future, the use of other well-established procedures to make appropriate determinations about the pay of these positions in lieu of making the proposed change through this bill.

Wages and benefits are generally matters for collective bargaining. We suggest that the bargaining table would be a more appropriate forum for addressing the pay issue raised, and indeed, the State is about to enter routine, biannual collective bargaining that provides a similar timeline for addressing the issue as legislation.

Following established procedures allows the State, as an employer, to thoughtfully review requests for pay increases in an organized manner with a comprehensive overall view of all related State positions. Increasing pay for positions through legislation could lead to many more individual legislative requests, which may unfortunately lead to reduced compensation fairness across State government. A pay imbalance is created when the pay of one group is adjusted without considering other associated groups. For example, legislatively increasing the pay for one type of caseworker, results in additional requests to increase the pay for another type of caseworker.

Again, while we certainly understand the intent of this bill, and we have the utmost respect and support for the employees who do this work, we suggest utilizing collective bargaining and the already established procedures and review processes rather than adjusting pay through this bill.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.