

**TESTIMONY OF JEFF MCCABE, MAINE SERVICE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION, SEIU  
LOCAL 1989**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC  
SAFETY  
MAY 17, 2021 1:00 PM**

**In Support of LD 1683, Resolve, To Compensate Department of Corrections Employees  
for Hazardous Work, Sponsored by Rep. Pluecker**

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Jeff McCabe, Director of Politics and Legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989. MSEA is a labor union representing over 13,000 members statewide. We urge you to support LD 1683, which would require the Department of Corrections to use federal funding to pay eligible employees a hazard duty stipend related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This stipend would be paid retroactively from when the previous hazard duty stipend ended until the state of civil emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic is terminated.

When the pandemic began in March 2020, many state employees who were not able to work remotely were granted hazard pay, including Department of Corrections workers. On December 23, 2020, MSEA received word that the various hazard pay agreements our members in state government had in place would terminate, including the agreement(s) that covered DOC staff. These agreements were terminated despite our state being in the depths of one of the largest COVID-19 surges at the time. These employees deserve to be compensated for the additional risk they face while doing their jobs – risk that did not end on January 1, 2021, when federal funding ran out. This legislation would ensure that Department of Corrections employees, who face significant risks of contracting COVID-19 while at work, continue to receive the hazard pay they deserve.

There's no doubt about it: Department of Corrections employees have been at an increased risk for contracting COVID-19 throughout this pandemic. These workers have interacted with coworkers and incarcerated persons daily, often in spaces where social distancing was difficult or even impossible. Their jobs could not be done remotely. Every day, they faced added stress of getting sick themselves or bringing the virus home to their families, and in some cases, workers have gotten sick and/or been forced to quarantine themselves and their families. There have been numerous outbreaks of COVID-19 in DOC facilities, including at Maine Correctional Center in Windham, Maine State Prison in Warren and Long Creek Youth Development Center; I have included links to news articles about some of those outbreaks at the bottom of my testimony.

It's important to point out that the pandemic has exacerbated long-standing issues within the Department of Corrections around recruitment and retention of workers. The recent [State of Maine Market Study Report](#) found that Maine State workers earn on average 15% less than their private and public sector counterparts throughout New England. Positions like Maintenance Mechanics make 31% less. Administrative workers make between 20 to 35% less. Rehabilitation Counselors make 25% less. Correctional Officers make 16% less, and

Correctional Captains make 26% less than their counterparts. We also have recently learned the Department of Corrections is hiring Correctional Officers at Step 3, simply because they are struggling to recruit anyone to fill the numerous open positions at Step 1 pay rates. Understandably, this can create tension as new employees may be paid higher rates than employees who have been working throughout the pandemic. This Committee also will remember that a \$2/hour stipend was given to corrections workers as part of a recruitment and retention bill enacted as part of the 2015/16 budget negotiations, but unfortunately, that stipend was not provided to all Corrections employees. These issues are all important to keep in mind when considering this legislation. While providing hazard pay will not resolve all of the recruitment and retention issues within the Department, it would be a step in the right direction and would ensure these workers are properly compensated for the increased risk they face. I urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 1683. Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions.

**MSEA Hazard Pay Memorandum of Agreement, Department of Corrections, June 2020:**

<https://www.mseaseiu.org/COVID-19/MSEA%20DOC%20Hazard%20Pay%20Agreement%20July%202020.pdf>

**Amended Memorandum of Agreement between MSEA & DOC:**

<https://www.mseaseiu.org/COVID-19/20200403-MSEA-DOC-Hazard-Pay-Agreement.pdf>

**State of Maine Market Study Report:** <http://legislature.maine.gov/doc/5615>

**News Articles Referencing COVID-19 Outbreaks in Department of Corrections Facilities:**

March 25, 2021 – Press Herald - “COVID-19 outbreak at Maine State Prison now totals 12 cases”: <https://www.pressherald.com/2021/03/25/covid-19-outbreak-at-maine-state-prison-now-totals-12/>

November 10, 2020 – News Center Maine - “Two Long Creek employees test positive for COVID-19, MDOC says”:  
<https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/two-long-creek-employees-test-positive-for-covid-19-mdoc-says/97-7cd91cfd-f4bb-4804-9766-a62bf2ee3d60>

November 9, 2020 – Bangor Daily News - “Outbreak at Windham prison grows to 131 cases”:  
<https://bangordailynews.com/2020/11/09/news/portland/outbreak-at-windham-prison-grows-to-131-cases/>

October 28, 2020 – News Center Maine - “Maine CDC opens outbreak investigation at Maine Correctional Center with 3 total COVID-19 cases”:  
<https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/mdoc-opens-outbreak-investigation-at-maine-correctional-center-with-3-total-covid-19-cases/97-7dfa6dc1-f7d5-467f-a09d-35168cced0b3>