

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

In Support of LD 1915, An Act Improve Intensive Behavioral Health and Public Safety Case Management Services, Sponsored by Representative Seth Berry

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, 1 PM Thursday, February 3, 2022,
at Cross Building Room 209

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, 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, including workers who serve as Intensive Case Managers for the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. We're here in support of LD 1915.

This legislation would provide a stipend of \$5 per hour for workers in the Intensive Case Manager job classification and a \$1 per hour stipend for those Intensive Case Managers who are holding or obtaining a relevant master's degree. As you may know, similar stipends are already being provided to caseworkers within the Maine DHHS Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) to aid in their recruitment and retention. LD 1915 merely would treat Intensive Case Managers the same as OCFS caseworkers in terms of stipends.

You also may recall that on January 18, this committee heard our testimony in support of LD 1792, which would provide a \$3 an hour, across-the-board raise to all workers at the State's two psychiatric hospitals, Riverview and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center, and we support amending LD 1792 to ensure workers at both of the hospitals' Outpatient Services Teams are included. They are all doing such critical work.

LD 1915, the subject of this hearing, focuses exclusively on the Intensive Case Manager job classification at Maine DHHS. LD 1915 is necessary because the ongoing public employee recruitment and retention problem in Maine State Government is particularly acute for Intensive Case Managers. [Please take a look at their job description linked here](#). It notes they provide crucial services in Maine to what the Maine Bureau of Human Resources calls a "a targeted group of high risk mental health clients in a local community." According to the bureau, the individuals with whom Intensive Case Managers work are "the most problematic/high risk mental health clients." Intensive Case Managers are the ones who support their integration into the community.

This is clearly difficult and dangerous work, yet the State has consistently fallen short when it comes to respecting, protecting and paying these workers fairly for their labor. Members of our union continue to demand the State make progress on addressing the low wages that Maine State Government pays State employees. As you may know, on average, State employees make 15% less than their counterparts throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional pay differences, according to the [State of Maine Market Study Report](#) dated Nov. 20, 2020.

To be sure, in contract bargaining in 2021, members of our Executive Branch bargaining team sought to address the state employee pay gap with the Mills administration. However, the administration during those negotiations refused to even acknowledge the pay gap. In fact, the administration began those negotiations without proposing any pay raise whatsoever for State employees. While our bargaining team and the administration ultimately made some progress on addressing the state employee pay gap by reaching agreement on a new two-year contract, much work remains to address the pay gap. Even with their new contract, state workers are still falling further and further behind the cost of living. [The U.S. inflation rate in 2021 increased to 6.8 percent](#) – the highest it's been since 1982, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Fortunately there is a solution to help recruit and retain Intensive Case Managers and to show them the respect they've earned doing this most difficult work on behalf of all Maine people. LD 1915 would go a

long way toward both addressing the pay gap and the recruitment and retention problem for these workers.

Thank you and I'd be glad to answer any questions.