

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, members of the Labor Committee. My name is Gabriel Hamlin I am writing on my own personal time in support of LD 579. I would like to thank the committee for reviewing and hearing this bill. This is not the first time that a bill of this nature has been drafted to include direct line staff from the psychiatric hospitals to be included in the 1998 Special Retirement Plan for the State Police, Maine state prison, and other valuable careers that is in The State of Maine.

I have been an employee for the state for the past eleven years. The majority of my career has been with Riverview Psychiatric Center. I have also worked at the Maine State Prison in Warren for a brief ten months before transferring back to Riverview only because the travel commute to Warren and my affordability in working between the two facilities. I found it very interesting that not only do the officers and other direct care professionals at the prison receive this retirement plan but any professional that works for the prison is in this retirement plan whether they have direct contact with the residents of the facility or not. I do not say I find interesting as a slight either; at Riverview Psychiatric Center I have been a direct care provider of individuals that have been found not criminally responsible for crimes of every nature as a well as other who have been committed for evaluations for competency to continue with court proceedings and individuals who have been civilly committed due to minor civil infractions and need treatment and assistance with reintegration into the community.

State officials in the Department of Corrections and Department of Health and Human Services have worked together with certain individuals of the highest dangerousness in recent history due to the safety of the residents and patients at both facilities as well as the staff; I have witnessed with my own eyes numerous assaults; some that have ended nurses and direct care workers careers due to severe injuries sustained while on duty.

The individuals that my coworkers and I serve, fellow Maine citizens just reading or hearing their stories of trauma that they have survived and being part of their recovery is a taxing toll on anyone serving them. At my time at Maine State Prison, the stories of the residents and my fellow coworkers at the prison of incidents around the facility were very similar to my experience at Riverview. I will not pretend that the two facilities are the same because they are not. I feel that because we serve our fellow citizens who struggle with trauma, addiction, mental illness that servitude is a shared burden by the professionals at all the state facilities. We are compensated, but it takes dedication to keep showing up even when our own lives are falling apart.

I would like to also share with the committee that before purchasing my own home, which is a brave thing to do in our current economy, I was seriously considering leaving Maine, my home state because our new England neighbor Vermont has a better

retirement plan for their mental health specialists and nurses for their state psychiatric hospital in recognition of the challenges and difficulties faced while working in direct care mental health. With a full twenty years of service, an employee may receive a full retirement with full benefits. The Vermont's state psychiatric hospital is a twenty-four bed facility verses Riverview's ninety-two bed facility. I implore the committee to pass this bill for my current and future colleagues. We ask for this thank you and recognition for our dedication to our vulnerable citizens who need the services these facilities provide. I thank the committee for your time and I ask for you all to support LD 579.

Sincerely,

Gabriel Hamlin