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First off, I would like to thank you for the taking the time to read this testimony and am grateful to share the great responsibility of protecting the people of Maine with you.

I am writing in order to give my reasons why the developmental services DS crisis team mental health worker III's should be considered for the 25/55 retirement plan. Our jobs consist of working 24 hours a day, seven days a week regardless of other state employees being shut down for holidays, or weather. When our other peers have weekends off or have their days end at 5pm we are asked to help support their needs during their off hours if they feel someone could be in danger or struggling. We cover vast area's with only minimum support in the face of several aspects of day. I am on a team that covers York, Oxford, and Cumberland county. At any notice we could be called to support hospitals, group homes, police, individual homes and more. We are often asked to help train individuals, group home staff, police, and hospital staff within our vast area of coverage.

We are not only exposed to physical danger without having the ability to call for other supports support with a hit of the button like our peers in hospitals and corrections. We must go to areas where we might not have any cell phone reception which enables us at times to be able to call for help from our first responder peers, or places where first responders are a long way out. We are also often going out on calls alone and we support everyone regardless of the danger that a situation brings. We are asked to put our lives on the line every single day in situations that range from single or multiple individuals being physically assaultive towards staff, peers, providers and individuals in the community. I have personally had to support someone whom was struggling while on the side of the road in a busy interaction during rush traffic while standing in what at the time I didn't know was poison oak. This situation caused me to go through almost month of painful recovery, two rounds antibiotics and be placed on leave due to not being able to work since my wounds were contagious due to the poison. Regardless of know about the poison oak or not, it would have changed my response as our job is to protect the lives of those who are struggling at the highest level. I have been in a meeting at the department where a struggling person hit me in the head with a chair, I was still able to calm the situation regardless my own physical health and keep everyone at the meeting safe. Situations like this are just the tip of the iceberg for situations we are put in.

Besides the physical trauma/ danger we are exposed to, we are also exposed to both first and secondhand trauma while working in this field. We are called to deal with scenes where people might have hurt others, themselves, yelling, screaming, crying, hearing stories of abuse, and helping stop all those things. We must help staff and providers deal with this trauma along with the consumers we serve. The longer we are exposed to these type of work conditions only leads to our bodies both physically and mentally breaking down over time. Recovery times for any type of injury only grows longer as we get older and injuring or straining body part in your 50's or 60's is likely to only increase possible permeant damage. This also goes for long term exposure to emotional trauma. Having talked to several of my peers, we see things that are difficult to shake and certainly increase our risk for PTSD. The cost amounts to the state to pay out possible disability benefits, along with retirement benefits or having to be retrained and put into be trained and put into another position due to injury are staggering.

On a brighter note some of the positive benefit of approving this 25/55 retirement program would allow the state to help recruit some of the better talent in the state, and even more cost-effective give incentives for people to stay. As someone who isn't just a crisis worker but also holds a master's degree in human resources management, I feel very confident in speaking about retention and the hiring process. Stronger benefit incentives give job seekers a strong reason to want to stay and work in Maine, which has been at times a difficult process to keep people within the state, especially in such a difficult field.

As it is well documented that recruitment and retention benefits can help save the state a lot of money due to the amount of money it cost the state to advertise, post, interview and months to train someone until they are ready to be in the field. As it is also well documented and reported in the news there is a huge shortage of social workers within our state to work with our population. With the massive shortage of workers in the field we are one of the best tools to help bridge this gap until companies are staffed.

While I do wish I was able to give you my reasoning and story in person, I am unable to do so as I am on duty today. I truly hope you help protect people like me by supporting this benefit request.

Thank you again for taking the time to read this and please feel free to reach out to me with any questions.