

LD 1808 - Written Testimony  
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To: Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, Members of the Committee on Labor and Housing:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee today. My name is Brandi Caron, I am employed by the Maine State Police Crime Laboratory as a Forensic DNA Analyst and I am here on my own time.

We meet yet again to discuss what essentially will hopefully be an amendment to the previously passed retirement bill LD 1101 for Crime Lab and Computer Crimes personnel.

When we met with members of the union and MainePERS early last fall after learning our bill had been passed, we were shocked to realize that for most of us with 10 or more years of service, opting into the early retirement program would penalize or negatively impact us financially. We would automatically become part of a split plan. We would have to pay an extra 1% towards our retirement and then also meet the age requirement which is 62 or 65 depending on when we began working. This would mean a 42% or 60% penalty to our retirement benefit.

When this endeavor was initially proposed, it was our intent to obtain the same 25-year retirement that our sworn counterparts had. They have straight 25-year retirement OR age 55 with at least 10 years of service. We are the first generation of Forensic Scientists/Analysts to do these jobs.

Our jobs were originally filled by sworn law enforcement officers who were assigned to the Crime Laboratory and already had a 20 or 25-year retirement plan. In 1984, the State of Maine hired its first civilian scientist. Over the course of the last 38 years, numerous other scientists have been hired and trained, but only one civilian scientist has retired with the appropriate number of years of service and age requirement. Most civilians leave within 5 – 15 years of service. We have had a revolving door of employees who pass the background checks, polygraph test, and the rigorous training which requires other trained scientists to set casework aside in order to train new people who leave all too soon.

The primary purpose driving this early retirement endeavor is to limit the amount of time that we are exposed to the vicarious traumas we endure through the course of our work. Ten years seems to be a common breaking point. So many of our good scientists have left around that time. I think a 25-year goal would have kept them and their valuable experience at the lab. Some people can take more than others and I can speak for myself where I have had several occasions over the last 20 years where I didn't think I could sit through another homicide meeting or see another dead child. I have had times where I can't even bear to watch the news. I have thought of leaving many times but keep going because there are victims out there who need us. It is depleting. Leaving before my time is up would feel like I didn't finish my job; it would feel like I failed. A straight 25-year retirement like our sworn counterparts gives our civilian scientists a goal to work towards. It is a sense of accomplishment and sense of completion for the difficult, emotionally challenging and stressful work that we do. It is a definitive mark of achievement and a means of compensation for the traumas that we will forever carry with us. These cases don't go away. Even after leaving employment we are called back to testify and meet on unsolved cases or appeals.

I ask that we make this right and that a straight 25-year retirement or age 55 with 10 or more years of service retirement benefit be granted to the dedicated members of the Crime Lab and Computer Crimes Units.

Thank you and I welcome any questions.