



MAINE AFL-CIO

A Union of Unions Standing for Maine Workers
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Testimony of Maine AFL-CIO Legislative & Political Director, Adam Goode, in Support of
LD 1808, An Act to Address Employee Retention at the Maine State Police Crime Laboratory and the
Computer Crimes Unit in the Department of Public Safety
LD 1746, An Act To Expand the 1998 Special Retirement Plan To Include Employees Who Work for the
Office of Chief Medical Examiner
LD 1840, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Retirement Benefit Reductions for Corrections
Supervisors Currently Included in the 1998 Special Plan

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Adam Goode. I'm the Legislative and Political Director of the Maine AFL-CIO. We represent 40,000 working people in the state of Maine. We work to improve the lives and working conditions of our members and all working people. We testify in support of LD 1808, 1746 and 1840.

Working people who serve as corrections officers, work in the State Police Crime Lab and Computer Crimes Lab and who work in the Medical Examiner's Office perform physically and emotionally traumatic work. It is a hallmark of the labor movement that working people should be able to retire with dignity and respect. This bill helps correct a terrible inequity that has resulted in these workers having different rules for when they can retire compared to other state employees in similarly stressful jobs.

Our testimony is in strong support of all three of these bills. Below we will provide some information on each group of workers.

LD 1808

In 2021 your committee and the legislature took action to improve access to the 1998 Special Retirement Plan for workers in the Maine State Police Crime Lab or at the Computer Crimes Unit who were hired after September 30th, 2021. This means that civilian workers in either of these units employed prior to 9/30/21 are excluded from the bill you passed last session.

This committee has heard stories of the horrific work these civilian workers do, largely in the name of protecting children. The work they do listening to traumatic 911 calls and viewing graphic videos demonstrates the emotional danger of the job. The fact that they often wear hazmat suits when collecting evidence shows the physical danger this work poses.

The issue at hand with this bill is whether the workers who do these jobs should be required to do this horrific work until they reach age 62 (or age 65 for those hired after July 1, 2006) in order to avoid an annual penalty on their retirement. The 1998 Special Retirement Plan exists for jobs that we cannot expect a person to perform until normal retirement age. We were struck by the fact that only one scientist at the State Police Crime Lab has made it to normal retirement age in the last 38 years.

¹ State of Maine Market Study Report, November 20, 2020 <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/5615>

To better meet the goals of the workers who have testified on this issue in past sessions, we would support making the 2021 changes retroactive so they cover employees from the date of hire. We believe all workers in these unites should be covered, regardless of their years of service and that current workers should be allowed to move from their current plan to the Special Plan. Finally, we support changing the statute to a straight 25-year retirement with no age requirement or age penalty. This would make it so co-workers and supervisors who are in the State Police have the same retirement security.

LD 1746

For the aforementioned bill and in the 129th and 130th Legislatures this committee has heard testimony from workers at the Maine State Police Crime Lab and the Computer Crimes Unit asking to be included in the 1998 Special Plan. LD 1746 is an effort to include State employees who work in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner in the 1998 Special Plan.

Physical and emotional trauma is a regular part of the job for people who work in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. We think a fair approach would be to treat those who do this work the same way as Corrections Officers who have access to the 1998 Special Plan. In order to avoid unfair treatment for similar work, we support applying this change to all workers currently employed in this office as well as future hires. This will help with both recruitment and retention issues.

LD 1840

In 2021 your committee and the Legislature removed early-retirement penalties for Corrections Officers. This means that Corrections Supervisors are currently working alongside Corrections Officers who have an opportunity to retire earlier than they do. This bill removes the early-retirement penalties for Corrections Supervisors, bringing parity to retirement security amongst both groups of workers.

Despite the obviously dangerous nature of all of the jobs mentioned in this testimony, it is documented that Maine falls short on paying public sector workers fairly for their labor. Members of Maine Service Employees Association SEIU 1989 have demanded that the state make progress on these low wages. It has been documented that, on average, state employees make 15% less than their counterparts throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional pay differences.¹

Improvements to access to the 1998 Special Plan would improve recruitment and retention and better recognize the sacrifices workers in these departments make when they do these dangerous jobs. We ask that you vote in favor of LD 1840, 1746 and 1808.
