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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND
HOUSING

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 313

An Act to Ensure Consistency in Retirement Plans for Certain Law Enforcement Officers

March 28, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Robby Gross, and I am the Chief Forest Ranger of the Maine Forest Service (MFS) at the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (DACF). I am speaking neither for nor against LD 313, *An Act to Ensure Consistency in Retirement Plans for Certain Law Enforcement Officers*.

There is variability in retirement plans among law enforcement officers within the Maine Public Employees Retirement System. If a law enforcement officer stays employed within one agency throughout their career, they are rewarded with retirement income consistent with the retirement plan that was in place upon initial hire. If they decide to move between agencies within their career, they have to navigate the details of multiple retirement plans to determine what their full retirement benefit will be and, in some cases, they can be penalized. In addition, other employees who become law enforcement officers, but have previously paid into the Maine Public Employees Retirement System (teachers, firefighters), also navigate the specifics of different retirement plans.

In today's workplace environment, recruitment and retention of employees are problems that every law enforcement agency faces. Each agency attempts to find unique ways to attract and keep employees to conduct critical missions that protect and enhance the State of Maine. An employee's retirement benefit shouldn't be penalized if they switch agencies. In the end, that employee's service benefits all of Maine. LD 313 enables employees to overcome penalties by allowing employees or their employers to buy into retirement plans to recover the cost difference when changing employers. This essentially allows the portability of one Maine State Retirement Plan to another Maine State Retirement Plan.

I supervise Forest Rangers who have come to the Maine Forest Service from other state law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and the education system where they were teachers. Retirement plans are one of the most discussed benefits impacting an individual's life and family. Likewise, it is a common talking point when I speak with potential candidates. Making these subtle changes to the Maine Retirement System will support recruiting great employees by

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ensuring that the employee receives full retirement credit for the service they provide the State of Maine.

At this time, the potential financial impacts of this bill on the Department's budget do give pause and will need to be evaluated. The elective nature of either the employee or employer being able to buy service time to make retirement plans whole is a concept worth developing. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.