

April 19, 2023

Attn: Labor and Housing Committee

RE: Public Hearing/LD 1499

Good morning. I am Louanne Pinkham, a retired State Employee with over 30 years of service to the State of Maine citizens.

I would like to thank all the co-sponsors of LD1499 and for this Committee's time and consideration of amending/revising LD1499. Those of us affected, early retired State Employees/Teachers, have been patiently awaiting an amendment to this law since 2011/2012. Some have, unfortunately, passed away while waiting for this needed change. I have seen this bill go through as LD1168, LD1184, LD 548 and now LD1499 thus far. With no amendments yet.

I started working for the State of Maine in 1979. I planned to work my entire life for the citizens of Maine and to retire with my full pension/health insurance coverage as had been promised originally, through an agreement between the State of Maine and MSEA. Little did I realize that over the years there would be many changes with PERS.

One of the first PERS Law changes I inherited was in becoming a Cliff Hanger. This meant if I had not earned 10 years of state service by a certain date, my NRA (Normal Retirement Age), of 60 would change to 62. My NRA was changed because my 10 years vested was missed by 7 months due to my taking 3 maternity leaves from 1983-1993. I also purchased back time to become vested at \$100 per paycheck for 3 years which in fact still did not help with making my situation vested, which would have kept my NRA at 60.

The most drastic change for myself as well as many others, however, was the law change that allowed us State Employee/Teachers to be mandated a 6% penalty from a 2.4% for each year of retirement prior to NRA. In my case this was a retiring age of 52 with a new NRA of 62 = 6% penalty for 10 years= 60% penalties. Nothing as sacred as a person's promised pension/benefits should have altered for a certain few.

Though I was not at age 52, ready for retirement and was planning to wait till our youngest of 7 graduated college, I had a change of heart and felt the right thing to do was to retire early and keep my much-needed health insurance with no premium. I had already seen drastic changes that I never signed up for in 1979 and was worried about what may end up changing further over time.

All through the years, lump sums were offered for early retirements and other gimmicks but some of us due to circumstances and changes that were made to our laws that we were forced to have, we were not gifted by having been allowed enticing early retirement plans. Instead, some of us kept getting the law changes that seemed to only affect us.

I decided to seek employment in the private sector, which was not always an easy task. I continued working through the years off and on since 2011, to maintain my home and well-being. The only years I am eligible for any amount of Social Security benefit were my four high school years and the years off and on after retirement with the State of Maine that I worked the private sector since 2011. My husband of 41 plus years, while waiting for this bill to become law, passed away on November 25, 2020, waiting to be put on a transplant waiting list, while also hoping to know that my future would be taken care of.

I assume many of our State Legislatures have heard the stories of how this bill has been devastating to us effected by this law, but I have been in total chaos since then. None of the changes to PERS in the last few years has assisted my situation at all. I did not get a retro lump sum of COLA increases as others, I did not get a COLA increase, in fact I have not received a COLA increase since retirement because I retired early, being part of the penalties.

Knowing that my new NRA was 62, rather than 60, I assumed that on 2/19/2022, when I turned 62, I would receive my first COLA increase. I did not receive a COLA increase on my 62nd birthday. I had to wait from 2/19/22 to 2/19/23 and then not receive a first COLA until fall of this year in 2023. After my 62nd birthday, I had to wait 1 year and 9 mos. before a possible COLA increase. I also did not get to take advantage of all the revisions, retro's and COLA increases enacted by the 130th Legislative for State of Maine pensions.

Along with new State Laws enacted to assist the huge burden on Maine's elderly, the new law to freeze property taxes in Maine has not applied for myself either. Though my income is way under the limit, I am only 63, not 65. No new laws have assisted me with any of my situations at all.

My CMP bill continues to rise, along with my property taxes, home insurance, car insurance, sewer bill as well as food, gas, etc. Daily it gets worse for me trying to decide daily what bills must be paid, what bills need to be paid and for those that can be put off for a bit with continuing to survive.

This law, LD 1499 if changed, will mean that my current pension will increase by 60% where 60% has been taken from me since December 2011. This income increase would be a dramatic improvement in my life. The only other income I have currently is my SS widow benefit. My current PERS pension and my SS Widow benefit will not get me through my retirement. This does not seem a fair pension considering my service to the citizens of Maine for over 30 years while raising a family of seven along the way. My husband was a hard-working worm digger/woodsman his entire life until he became disabled, and we always made enough to provide for our family and felt I would be taken care for my lifetime with my State of Maine pension as it was intended, along with my promised healthcare package.

I am begging this Legislature to please fix this injustice that happened to us dedicated State Employees/Teachers back in 2011/2012. The 130th Legislature we all felt would take care of this for us. There was plenty of funding available, the bill was approved through the House and the

Senate and was forwarded to the Appropriations Committee for approval of the funding. It was there where it stalled and was not even voted upon. The year before last it was also passed through both houses and then tabled because of Covid I believe at that time. In the past four years, the last two have not been or should not have been an issue for its passage, if folks had understood the true bill amendment and how it would assist us that are suffering.

In the last Legislative session, I emailed each one of Maine's House members, Senate members and all the Appropriation Committee members telling my personal history of how this bill affected myself and showing my support of the bill's passage. I had only one, Representative reach out to me. Of all the years I served the public I had just one person to show me interest. I was so surprised and devastated with the lack of knowledge of this bill and the support.

This 131st Legislature has a chance to research, again, this law, and to make it right for us. These changes that the past Legislature made in 2011/2012 changed the course of our lives forever and forced us to make decisions that we should not have had to make. I did have a financially stable retirement planned during my many years of State Employment but that all changed in 2011/2021. This correction of law would be huge for those of us that have suffered and continue to suffer daily.

I'm asking for the Committee's members to please discuss with this bill's co-sponsors, that have done the research, to explain why they are in support of this bill, which has had bi-partisan support, in the past as well as the present. My hopes are that our individual situations/hardships being explained to you all, along with the bill's bi-partisan co-sponsors knowledge, research and support of the bill will guide you all to forward this bill to assist in the passage of it becoming a law.

Thank you for your time and consideration to the passage of LD1499.

Respectfully,

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