

To whom this may concern.

4/19/2023

I would like to thank you for taking your time and reading this. I will try to keep this short as I know how busy everyone is. Bill LD 1424 which would remove the age requirement for correctional staff covered under the 1998 Special plan, is something that is long overdue. Some of you might know the challenges and how difficult it is to work inside of a prison, as for most people they will never know besides what they see on tv or the internet.

Men and women dedicate their lives to public service, they get up every day putting their wellbeing and lives at risk by working inside. Staff are tasked with the care, custody, and treatment of violent offenders. Staff are burdened with the things they experience and see daily that is why corrections officers have one of the highest rates PTSD and burnout in the nation. The sad part is most will never reach retirement, and for ones that do usually die shortly after. The national life expectancy for correctional staff is only 59, and as it sits now our retirement age is set at 55 giving us 4 years to enjoy after 25 years of service. Does that sound like a good deal? Most people would say NO. Now ask yourself would you want this for one of your family members? Or the 18-year-old high school graduate that would have 37 years to do.

This is real for us; throughout the years I have lost good friends that didn't even make it 2 years after they retired. Everyday staff are just clinging on to hopes of one day being able to retire. Constantly dangerously short staffed, stressed beyond belief, hiring kids straight out of high school to work in this environment and wondering why they quit, or asking why don't people want to work in a prison? We all know why It is extremely hard and most cant do this line of work. Most people won't even consider it. I have had plenty of Law enforcement officers say, "NO WAY IN HELL WOULD I WORK IN THE PRISON". Even after all this, Maine is still a leader in the nation when it comes to prison reform. Who do you think does the work? It is the professional hard-working men and women of the department of corrections that dedicate their lives to their chosen profession.

We need your help and support to eliminate the age requirement of the retirement and making it a flat 25. This would greatly help recruitment and retention. It gives people **hope**, it eases the thought of I'm never going to making it, being able to see that there **IS** in fact a light at the end of the tunnel. Other agencies in Maine have already addressed this issue by offering Flat 25-year retirements some even offering 2/3 retirement pay. It is my hope that you can see that we deserve a flat 25-year retirement and act by passing this bill.

Sincerely..... Joseph Theriault