

Good afternoon, members of the Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Cindy Homer, I reside in Augusta and work as a senior laboratory scientist at the Maine State Police Crime Laboratory. I am writing today in support of LD 197, "An Act to Address Employee Retention at the Maine State Police Crime Laboratory and the Computer Crimes Unit in the Department of Public Safety."

I have been working at the Crime Lab for a little over 21 years. Within that time, I have examined dead men, women, children, and infants for fingerprints and other pattern injuries. On countless numbers of cases I have had to, quite literally, wear the skin of decomposing men, women, and children because it was rotting off, and I needed to obtain their fingerprints in order to identify them. I have searched through matted and bloody hair and skin still adhered to the duct tape that was used by a parent to suffocate their own child. I have examined tire tracks on the crushed head of a dead infant.

I am a civilian and I attend crime scenes alongside law enforcement; usually called in to do a task they are not trained to do or are uncomfortable doing. I see what they see, smell what they smell, and experience what they experience. I have been told by police officers on more than one occasion that the truly gruesome evidence is left for the scientists at the crime lab to deal with. We don't just see the evidence at the scene, we take it with us to the lab, and can spend weeks and sometimes months hovering over, studying, and living with the most horrific things you can imagine.

I was once left at a remote murder scene because the police called it a night and had forgotten about the civilian still processing the scene. I'll never forget the numbing shock of fear that I experienced when I realized I was alone in the deep Maine woods, at night, unarmed, and untrained in how I could defend myself if the killer was still hanging around in the darkness watching the scene unfold.

Even with all of the traumatic sights, smells, and sounds that are forever seared into my mind, and as emotionally and mentally exhausting as it has been, I have loved being a forensic scientist. I love helping to solve puzzles, and knowing that I am helping someone and serving the public. I am, however, a finite human with a finite capacity for trauma. Because of this, I am here to support LD 197. Currently, a person coming out of college in their early twenties who is hired by the State of Maine as a scientist in the crime laboratory will accumulate over 40 years of the trauma that I've described above. We carry it everywhere; it comes home with us. The handful of appointments a state employee can get with the Maine State Employee Assistance Program can only help get through immediate trauma. LD 197 is what is needed to minimize the year after year of accumulated trauma that is experienced by the civilian scientists at the Maine State Police Crime Laboratory.

Thank you,

Cindy Homer

16 May 2023

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Augusta
LD 197

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