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To: Senator Tipping and Representative Roeder, Members of the Committee on Labor:

My name is Brian Juengst, and I work in the latent section of the Maine State Police Crime Laboratory. I am here on my own time in support of LD 197. I understand that is typical for supplemental budgets to evolve and change because of public input, change packages proposed by departments, and the hard work of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. I support the efforts to address recruitment and retention as part of the public safety budget, including the special retirement aspects for emergency communications specialists. Like those specialists, I work daily with sworn law enforcement officers and employees of public safety. Like members of the law enforcement community and those emergency communications specialists, at the end of day, the employees of the Crime Lab take aspects of our work home with us as we try to be present for our families. We compartmentalize what we see and do so that we may function and lead regular lives. My law enforcement coworkers who are sworn officers, and those working as emergency dispatchers, are allotted special retirement allowing them to retire after 25 years. I ask that you consider including in the supplemental budget language and funding to allow for special retirement for crime lab and computer crime lab employees.

My job routinely requires me to handle, process, and examine items to find fingerprints or shoe prints, often using a variety of chemicals and special equipment. Sometimes the evidence is rather benign, such as a shoe print in snow at a burglary of a hunting camp. Others are more sinister, such as a plastic bag used to wrap the body of a baby discarded in a basement. On occasion, I assist the State Police and Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to preserve and document difficult evidence. Evidence such as the bloody palm prints of a victim on a bathroom wall as she became trapped by her attacker. Evidence like the possible shoe impressions on the back and head of an abused infant after autopsy. Oftentimes, my findings rest on a fragment of a fingerprint smaller than a dime. I then may have to defend my conclusions in court under the most intense scrutiny as a defense lawyer or expert attack my work. Every day, I know that any mistake, any misstep in my process, could result in an innocent party being condemned or the guilty to walk free. Despite the ever-present pressures and horrors associated with my work, I am expected and required to walk the thin line of neutrality that is the heart of Science. I must remove all emotion and bias less it colors my findings and cloud my judgement. These factors make employee retention a tough sell in this line of work. A 25 year retirement plan would be an incentive for employees and new hires to stay longer, and it would show recognition for the hardships of this line of work.

Thank you for your time, and I encourage you to fund special retirement for crime lab and computer crime lab employees in the supplemental budget.