

TESTIMONY OF RAMONA WELTON
MAINE STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION, SEIU LOCAL 1989
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND HOUSING

March 25, 2019, Cross Office Building 202

Good afternoon Senator Bellows, Representative Sylvester, and the members of the Committee on Labor and Housing. I'm here today to speak in favor of LD 1214, Resolve, To Conduct a Comprehensive Study of the Compensation System for State Employees.

My name is Ramona Welton, and I have the pleasure of representing the nearly 10,000 workers in State Government as the President of the Maine State Employees Association. I'm an Auditor 1 at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, where I do process audits around controlled inventory. I started my career in public service 35 years ago, in 1984, as Clerk 1.

The state's compensation system was put into place in the same year as Wheel of Fortune started and the Vietnam War ended. It was the same year that the very first versions of the personal computer were introduced, suffice to say, few State workers were using them. Since then, virtually every aspect of the workplace has changed dramatically, but the basic structure of the compensation system hasn't.

We recently surveyed state workers, and the results were troubling. 83% of state workers said their departments are having a difficulty recruiting and retaining staff and 59% said they're considering leaving state service. For us, these results weren't surprising. Over the last year, we've heard about recruitment and retention crises with 911 dispatchers, DHHS caseworkers, snowplow truck drivers, and engineers, just to name a few. It shouldn't take a crisis in services to prompt action. It's past time to recognize that these aren't just issues in one or two departments, but a systemic problem throughout state government.

Under the current system, departments often have to go to great lengths to recruit qualified staff. At Maine Revenue Services they've adopted a practice of hiring employees at step eight, the top of the pay scale. As soon as that employee is hired, they have few incentives to stay in their current position. They won't be eligible for the longevity incentive until they've reached 15 years of service. Similar issues exist in the Department of Transportation; we've heard from transportation workers who've been working with the state for four to five years only to work next to recently-hired transportation workers who've been hired at step four or five, and are making the same rate of pay as those who have been working with DOT for years. The departments have no better options; they need to recruit staff in an increasingly competitive environment and must work with the compensation system as it currently stands. I experience this fierce competition as a process auditor for the Secretary of State. I work with town auditors; we earn about \$20 an hour, they earn about \$45 hour, or more, despite the fact we've provided the training, directly and indirectly, for many of their staff.

The State has not followed through on its obligation to review and maintain the system and therefore has created a problem too big to be solved through the normal methods of addressing these issues. Pay

studies, collective bargaining, and stipends are all important tools the state has to address these issues. But after years of neglect, and crisis-induced adjustments, the current system lacks internal cohesion, and fails to stay current with market conditions. We need a neutral third party to lead a data-driven process that can review the entire compensation system, review job classifications, compile alternative models, and provide an analysis of how state employees' pay compares to the employers and industries that the state of Maine is competing with.

I hope you'll join me in supporting LD 1214 to ensure a modern and effective state government that can provide the quality public services the people of Maine expect.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to take any questions you may have.