

April 10, 2019

Senator Bellows and Representative Sylvester members of the Committee On Labor and Housing, my name is Jill Armstrong and I am a member of the Maine State Employees Association here on my own time. I am a resident of Monmouth, and I am here today to speak favor of *LD 1355, An Act To Expand the 1998 Special Retirement Plan To Include Civilian Employees Who Work for the Department of Public Safety Crime Lab and Computer Crimes Unit-Senator Bill Diamond of Cumberland.*

I am in support of this bill because I am a forensic analyst with the Maine State Police Computer Crimes Unit (CCU), and I've experienced firsthand the many negative consequences that working with such gruesome material day in and day out has on all aspects of my life. That being said, I can't even begin to touch upon everything that needs to be known about the work that we do, so I would urge anyone willing to please call or email and get in touch with any one of us and we will do our best to answer any questions and try to get you to understand the severity of our working conditions.

Before starting this job, I was so naïve as to how prevalent child pornography was, and to even WHAT child pornography was. More times that I can count, I have people in my personal and professional life telling me how hard it must be to have to look at naked teenagers all day. All I can do is smile and think to myself "if you only knew". Having to look at naked teenagers everyday would be a breath of fresh air compared to the reality of what we are dealing with.

But the reality is, we have to view and watch toddlers in diapers having objects inserted into their vaginas and anus; 2 year old girls with red, swollen vaginas and semen covering their faces and mouths; 3 year old boys with adult females performing oral sex on them and being made to have sexual intercourse with animals; mother's holding down the hands of their daughters while look of sheer terror and pain is on the daughter's face as multiple men take turns raping her; children forced to pose with their genitals engage in intercourse with other children. There is no limit to the heinous acts the analysts are viewing every single day and it's no surprise this work takes a toll on our personal lives as well.

I recall time after time that I have come home from work in an angry mood and have such a short fuse for my husband and children because of the burnout I feel from work and the anger I am filled with after seeing adults abuse these children. I remember an occasion where my husband was changing our 1.5 year old son's diapers and I heard my son screaming "No Daddy, bum hurt" and immediately flashbacks of the case I was working on where a toddler was being molested on their changing table took over my mind. I remember questioning my husband in an accusing manner as to why my son was saying "No Daddy, bum hurt" even though I soon realized he in fact had a diaper rash that was causing his pain. But as you can image, my initial reaction of suspecting my husband was doing anything but changing our sons diaper was extremely hurtful .

As much as we try to compartmentalize the work we do from our personal lives, we aren't always successful in keeping the two separate. There are times when I'm giving my boys a bath or changing their diapers, and all I can see are images of boys their age (2 years old & 10 months old) being anally raped. Or when I lay down to go to sleep, and see flashbacks of the case I am working on. And even worse, there are times when trying to be intimate with my husband and I just can't get the victim's out of my mind. I have found I no longer have patience for the work/life drama of my family friends and find myself thinking instead "these issues are so minuscule". Sometimes, I simply just have to break down and cry to my husband when the emotions become too overwhelming to deal with.

In addition to the content we are dealing with, we share many of the same duties as a Detectives and/or Special Agent. Like them, we routinely assist in executing search warrants, where we go into the suspect's home to gather/process evidence, often times in such horrific living conditions that we must wear hazmat suits to protect ourselves from the bedbugs, animal feces, drug paraphernalia, and infectious diseases.

We are responsible for processing the evidence, often times looking through hundreds of thousands of videos and images and choosing only the most egregious sample for the Detectives to view.

We are responsible for testifying on our findings both on the state and federal levels.

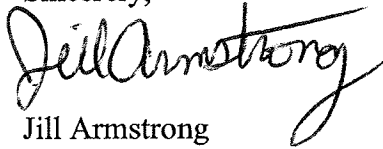
We are responsible for attending homicide meetings, where all aspects of the developing investigations are presented, including the results of the medical examiner's evaluation of the trauma that occurred. I vividly recall my first baby homicide meeting at the Crime Lab where I was shown image after image of a baby's bruised and beaten body, and learned of what types of trauma would cause such injuries. In addition, we were made to listen to the 911 call where the baby's gurgled breathing after the beating had occurred could be heard.

We are responsible for being called out at night/weekends to process evidence depending on the severity of the situation.

I cannot tell you how many times I have been in conversation with troopers and detectives who tell me that they "don't know how I do the work that I do" and that they "could never look at child pornography full time". And these are troopers and detectives, who have a 25 year retirement plan, openly admitting that they would not be able to handle or survive dealing with the content that we are dealing with every single day. In fact, one of our current Sergeants has recently put in for a transfer out of the unit in large part to the overwhelming stress and traumatic exposure being a member of this unit has. He has stated that he would like to mentally decompress and have some years of normalcy prior to starting his retired life.

Collectively, we could all talk for hours about the issues that we are facing dealing with the work that we do, and what we have spoken about here today and truly just the tip of the iceberg. I urge anyone to PLEASE reach out to any of us to help answer any questions you may have, schedule a time to come visit the lab and see the type of work we do and WHY having a 25 year retirement plan is crucial for the analysts of the CCU. I encourage the committee to support this bill and thank you greatly for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jill Armstrong". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and "A".

Jill Armstrong

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