

LD 1355 - Written Testimony  
Brandi L. Caron

April 10, 2019

To: Senator Bellows and Representative Sylvester, Members of the Committee On Labor and Housing:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee today. My name is Brandi Caron, I am a member of the Maine State Employees Association I am employed by the Maine State Police Crime Laboratory as a Forensic DNA Analyst and I am here on my own time. Also I would like to add that the opinions and experiences I express here are my own and not meant to represent the political standing and/or opinions of the Maine State Police or the Crime Laboratory.

I am here today in support 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.

Very few people realize the impact that the duties of a Forensic Scientist/Analyst have on the employees. It's a workload you never get ahead of. Both the mental fatigue from extreme stress and the cumulative effects of exposure to direct and vicarious traumas present significant emotional hazards for the people in this line of work. Special pension plans are designed for persons employed in jobs that place them in various special-risk classifications and to compensate employees for lasting physical or mental damage. The civilian employees of the Maine State Police Crime Laboratory and Computer Crimes Units deserve this benefit.

Scientists and analysts in this field experience mental fatigue and burn out brought on by high stress. We function under extreme stress because the stakes are high. Failing to find a bloodstain, a semen stain or a fingerprint could mean a guilty person goes free. Misidentifying a DNA profile could wrongfully implicate someone in a crime they didn't commit. There is no room for errors; a single honest mistake in lab work could taint the expert witnesses' credibility and perceivably end a career. Testifying as an expert witness in court is a huge responsibility and one we don't take lightly. Only the scientist who wrote a report can testify to those findings. Myself and other females have even had to testify while on maternity leave and/or return from maternity leave earlier than planned to testify in court. Very few people will ever come to endure the extreme stress and pressure of taking the stand in the adversarial arena of open court.

In this job we document and examine rape kits, blood soaked clothing items, sex toys used in acts of rape and a multitude of weapons. We are familiar with the details of the cases submitted to us and we attend crime scenes and autopsies. Every case is someone's tragedy; a person or their property has been violated and the accused stands to lose their freedom. It is not necessarily the most horrific of cases that stand out in my mind, but rather the combination of so many tragedies. Whether we are directly involved at the crime scene, or through vicarious indirect exposure this has a cumulative effect that builds over time. This has had an impact on my personal life. For example, moments of motherhood that should be precious memories like my son's first bath was instead contaminated by the memory of a case involving an infant whose mother drugged and drowned him in a tub. Finding maggots in a trash barrel at the end of the driveway is instantly associated with memories of various

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cases involving decomposed remains and bodies encountered at work. Changing my baby's diaper brings back images from a binder containing hundreds of pictures of child pornography that was submitted to us so the individual pages could be examined for semen stains and fingerprints left behind from the person who created or assembled the binder.

Each day the evening news highlights that day's events giving the public a brief glimpse of what is going on, but the dedicated Forensic Scientists and Analysts work in the quagmire of horrific details that citizens of this state never have to hear. I think the dedicated men and women who work at the Crime Laboratory are exceptionally good at what they do because they care about their work, they care about the law enforcement agencies they serve and they care about the safety of the citizens of this state. Lab based positions in the private sector pay significantly more than what we earn from state government and our existing retirement benefits are the same as most other state employees even though the expectations upon us and the emotional burdens we carry are more in line with the expectations of law enforcement officers. Shouldn't the retirement benefits be comparable to that which our sworn counterparts partake? Having already worked at the Crime Laboratory for close to twenty years, I am unsure if this bill would benefit me personally, but knowing what I know about how this job impacts one's life, I feel compelled to support this bill for the future employees of the Crime Laboratory and Computer Crimes Unit. I urge you to support this bill and I welcome any questions.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brandi L. Caron