

April 10, 2019

Testimony in support 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.

Senator Bellows, Representative Sylvester and distinguished members of the Committee on Labor and Housing.

My name is Andrea Donovan and I am a civilian employee with the Maine State Police Computer Crimes Unit as well as a member of the Maine State Employees Association and I am here on my own time. I am a resident of _____ I am here today to speak in support 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.

I have worked with the Computer Crimes unit for 13 years as a Computer Forensic Analyst. My primary duties are analyzing digital media, locating and extracting evidentiary information for charging purposing and testifying and presenting evidence in court and also assisting law enforcement officer in the field.

As an analyst my primary job is to process homicide and child exploitation cases. Approximately 95 percent of the cases I work on involve child pornography. Processing and analyzing each child pornography case can take a few days to several weeks depending on the amount of data involved.

People often think “child pornography” is just nude images of children in the bathtub or playing on the beach. In reality, however, child pornography consists of actual crime scene photos or videos of children being sexually abused and exploited. Each day while working on these cases I am subjected to having to view potentially thousands of images and movies of young children being raped and/or sexually abused. This can include having to repeatedly view videos or images of babies being sexually penetrated by adult men while these babies are lying on their diapers and are crying or screaming out in pain while this is being filmed by their perpetrator. In addition to our exposure to children being victimized, there is also a large amount of torture and deviant sexual images and movies that analysts are exposed to in a large number of cases that we process.

I remember thinking in the beginning to keep reminding myself that this is something that has already occurred, that I couldn't change it, that in some countries its is how these kids are raised. And then I started getting cases that were of local men raping local children. These are the cases that changed everything for me. These are the cases that made me a different person that when I

started this job. This is especially true once I had my own child, a little girl. I will never trust a man other than her father with my precious girl. Everyone is suspect. Little things like making sure she has the proper bathing suit so that she is not looked upon as "child erotica" for somebody's pleasure became my new normal. Always keeping her in my sight no matter where we are, because everyone man is a suspect. No one prepared me for this.

I have worked many cases where highly respected men in our local community have committed egregious crimes against young children. One case in particular is of a karate instructor in Augusta who befriended families within his Dojo. The families entrusted him with the care of their young boys to the point that he would take them on trips. During these trips, this individual would drug these boys and repeatedly rape them while videotaping these heinous acts. Through my forensic work and that of another analyst we were able to recover videos and images that were manufactured by the karate instructor and presented them for prosecution. Between the State and Federal court systems, this individual received a combined sentence of 100 years. To this day every time I see this man's face or hear his name I have flashbacks of the videos that he created of one particular small boy that he assaulted.

I also worked on a case of a well-respected teacher in Jackman who had received various national awards that was secretly filming and molesting young girls in his kindergarten class. Due to this case when I had my daughter I would not allow her to be in a classroom with a male teacher or ride the school bus that was driven by a male.

In the time we process these cases and a suspect is sentenced an analyst may have to view this same material a dozen times and testify to the contents of these images and movies in great detail on the stand in court.

As forensic analysts with the Computer Crimes Unit we are expected to respond and process scenes where warrants are executed alongside sworn law enforcement personnel. The analysts frequently go into residences to gather and/or process evidence. The analysts have very limited training in processing crime scenes and are not issued protective gear (guns, bullet proof vests etc,) thus causing anxiety in most of us that perform these duties. There are times these residences are so bad that personnel have to wear protective suits, due to feces, bed bugs, hoarding, known diseases, etc.

The majority of law enforcement officers currently employed in the State of Maine benefit from a straight 25 year retirement plan. This is in part due to physical fitness. Another reason is job stress and the potential exposure to traumatic scenes and suffering. As computer analysts with the State of Maine, we experience this type of stress and traumatic exposure on a daily basis.

In the United States the majority of analysts that process child pornography cases are sworn law enforcement that are normally only assigned to these duties for an average of 3 years before being moved to a different unit. This is due to the stress and mental toll continually looking at children being victimized can take on an analyst. The Maine Computer Crimes Units is one of the only Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) units in the country where forensics is performed solely by civilian forensic analysts staff.

As analysts we are exposed to the most heinous of crimes, those against little children. This causes vicarious trauma amongst our analyst and we have all at one time or another when working with on a difficult case, experienced feelings of anger, disgust, despair, fatigue and being overwhelmed by the amount of violence and child pornography that is involved in a particular case.

Although we find this work satisfying and feel that we make a difference in supporting victims of sexual abuse, it does have a negative impact on family life and is particularly difficult with personnel with young children. There is a gradual lessening or lack of compassion or empathy for co-workers, family and even victims. In order to do our job adequately and to protect ourselves, analysts have to become "desensitized" to the pain and suffering of these children and that can be very sad and overwhelming at times.

There are times after working a case where when I close my eyes at night I see the images that I spend all day looking at. I find myself hypervigilant with my own child and will never let another male be alone with my child other than her father. Whenever I see a small child alone with an adult male, my mind automatically questions is they are a victim of his. When my daughter was a baby/toddler and I would change her diapers or help her bath I always felt dirty as flashes of children being victimized came into my mind that were similar in age to her and thought of "how can anyone do this to a helpless child".

Analysts are expected to process a large amount of data involving child pornography and or evidence in homicide cases. Doing this repeatedly can cause a great deal of stress and compassion fatigue, which is compounded by a large number of cases to analyze and a small number of analysts to do the work. Sworn personnel are specifically trained to deal with large amounts of stress and emotionally charged work which is not the case for civilian analysts. When a case is completed and handed over to the investigating officer they may have to look at the evidence once or twice prior to court. An analyst is expected to review the information many times and memorize each aspect of the charging images and videos. As an example, I recently had to review videos from a case I completed in 2009 to determine the ages of the victims for the

New Hampshire sex offender registry. I found it very disturbing to have to re-examine these videos in such detail.

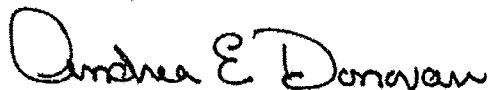
I also feel LD 1355 is needed to recruit and obtain qualified forensic analysts. For the past several years I have been involved in the hiring process for new forensic analysts. Recruitment and retention has been difficult for our unit. The last two analysts who have left our employment obtained jobs in the private sector, where there is significantly less stress and mental trauma. This was a huge loss to our unit as both of these analysts had a large amount of Computer Crimes money, training time invested in them. Many of the applications we have received are from people that are just graduating from college. It has been difficult to recruit/hire young knowledgeable individuals after explaining the details of the position and also knowing that they will have to stay in this job for over 40 years to be able to collect retirement.

Due to the uniqueness of our jobs and specialized training we do not have another place to transfer to within state government without being demoted and decreasing our pay. There are no policies or procedures in place to relocate analysts to comparable jobs, both in skill and in pay should the need arise.

Most people I know could not or would not ever want to do the job we do. Many times I hear from Police Officers that they could never do the job we do. I understand these memories will never be gone from my mind. I have taken on a job that does a lot of good for a lot of children, but I will never be the same person I was before I started. I will always be leery, or suspect of people that are around children. Certain things will always trigger memories of what I have seen. I work alongside Police Officers every day and perform many of the same duties that they perform, without the same benefits. I cannot imagine having to go through this for 40 years and that is why I urge you to pass this important legislation

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony, I know it is not pleasant. I thank you for your attention to this important issue. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss this in more detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrea E. Donovan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andrea E Donovan