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STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIRST LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND HOUSING

May 23, 2023

Sen. Joseph Baldacci, Chair
Rep. Michele Meyer, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Sen. Craig V. Hickman, Chair
Rep. Jessica Fay, Chair
Government Oversight Committee

Dear Sens. Baldacci and Hickman and Reps. Meyer and Fay,

The Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing ("LBHS Committee") on Wednesday, May 3, 2023 held public hearings on LDs 1760, "An Act to Include Certain Crisis Outreach and Crisis Services Workers Under the 1998 Special Plan for Retirement" and LD 1761, "An Act to Include Certain Mental Health Workers Under the 1998 Special Plan for Retirement," both sponsored by President Jackson. The bills propose to add specific employees of the Department of Health and Human Services to the 1998 Special Plan as part of the Maine Public Employees Retirement System.

The LBHS Committee heard concerning testimony from current employees of Riverview Psychiatric Center ("Riverview") and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center ("Dorothea Dix") that the LBHS Committee feels warrants further consideration, if not action, by your committees of jurisdiction.

Testimony given both orally and in writing at this public hearing contained graphic testimony of the physical assaults that employees providing direct care have undergone. The LBHS Committee received testimony from numerous employees testifying that their hair had been pulled and that they had been punched and hit by patients. Some employees testified that they had seen their coworker leave the worksite via ambulance.

Obviously, the LBHS Committee does not have jurisdiction over health and human services matters, nor does it regularly deal with bills effecting Riverview and Dorothea Dix aside from

legislation that generally affects state employees. The LBHS Committee looks to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services to determine whether additional investigation is warranted into these matters.

Specifically, the LBHS Committee thinks it may be worthwhile to consider:

1. Safety of employees working at Riverview and Dorothea Dix;
2. Staffing of Riverview and Dorothea Dix; and
3. Healing, including from both physical wounds and psychological wounds, including workers' compensation and post-traumatic stress disorder.

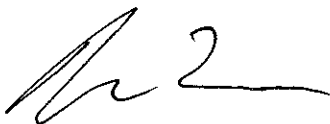
The LBHS Committee is concerned about the safety of employees at Riverview and Dorothea Dix, given the testimony the committee received on the two retirement bills.

Staff recruitment and retention was also a large part of the discussion at the public hearing. The jobs are often physically demanding, meaning that many employees are working in situations where the physical responsibilities may exceed their capabilities due to age. The LBHS Committee, in its consideration of these two retirement bills, will consider whether offering a more favorable retirement plan to these employees may help with staff recruitment and retention.

Also related to staffing is looking at the need for more staffing generally. The LBHS Committee heard testimony that perhaps the levels of staffing are leading to situations where employees are having to take more risks at work, or they're having to take on responsibilities that would be best shared with more employees on-site.

As previously described, the LBHS Committee defers to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services and the Government Oversight Committee to determine what next steps, if at all, should be taken to examine these issues. Thank you for your consideration of our comments and concerns. If we can be of any assistance in the future, please do not hesitate to contact us via Steve Langlin, our Legislative Analyst in the Office of Policy and Legal Analysis, at 207-287-1670.

Sincerely,



Senator Michael Tipping
Senate Chair



Representative Amy Roeder
House Chair

Cc:

Members, Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
Peter Schleck, Director, Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability