

Maine Stater

Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union

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Proposed Supplemental State Budget —

Fund closing the pay gap!

Thanks to members mobilizing during our contract campaign, we made progress on closing the state employee pay gap, including raising the minimum starting wage to \$15 an hour, but it's not nearly enough to correct years of cuts, stagnation and rising costs.

We all know reports in 2020 and 2009 show we're underpaid by 15% on average — far more than that for scores of positions including, but certainly not limited to, chemists, maintenance mechanics, civil engineers, office assistants and associates, customer service representatives for our state parks, corrections officers and supervisors, and the workers at the State-run schools in Maine's unorganized territories.

It's past time to right this ship: Tell **Governor Mills, your state legislators** and the **Appropriations Committee**: In the Supplemental Budget, fund closing the pay gap!

Go to
bitly.com/FundClosingThePayGap
and tell Governor Mills, your state legislators and the Appropriations Committee:
Fund closing the state employee pay

Maine's elected leaders need to hear from you.
Tell them your story.
Tell them what you're doing to make ends meet as you provide the services Maine people count on.
Tell them the State has the resources to address the pay gap and it's unconscionable to do nothing.
Tell them to fund closing the pay gap! Use this link: bitly.com/FundClosingThePayGap
Read the 2020 State of Market Study report at bit.ly/2020MarketStudyReport and the 2009 Labor Market Survey at bit.ly/2009LaborMarketReport



We lost a true advocate for all Maine workers with the death of MSEA-SEIU Retiree Member and four-term House District 85 State Rep. Donna Doore of Augusta on Jan. 31. She was a member of our Motor Vehicle Chapter, then our Area 2 Retirees Chapter. Story, Page 3.

Inside! Members speak up for legislation addressing recruitment, retention problems

- P6:** School workers at State-run schools in Maine's unorganized territories: Stop throwing us off our health insurance and forcing us onto COBRA!
- P7:** Over 100 Riverview, Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center workers call for hourly stipend, telling legislators: Respect us, protect us, pay us!
- PP10-11:** Workers Office of Medical Examiner, Crime Lab, Computer Crimes Unit workers, corrections supervisors describe grueling work, demand inclusion in 1998 Special Retirement Plan.
- P13:** Frontline workers demand representation on Maine Community College System and UMaine System Boards of Trustees.
- P14:** Intensive Case Managers at Maine DHHS demand hourly stipends, citing their difficult and dangerous work.



"We are ready to move forward as a union, start to tackle the issues and concerns all of us share, and begin to prepare for negotiations — so once the (National Labor Relations) Board counts our ballots, we are ready to bring everyone's voices to the negotiations table."

— **Bates Educators and Staff Organization Organizing Committee**

Full statement,
Page 4

Speak up for a fair Supplemental Budget

Every night and weekend, scores of child protective caseworkers in the **Office of Child and Family Services** at Maine DHHS are forced to work overtime shifts, on top of their regularly scheduled workdays, responding to the needs of Maine children and families. This has been happening for years. Training programs to help caseworkers do their jobs have been rolled back. Staffing shortages have abounded with caseworkers leaving due to burnout.

We've brought up the need to address children's emergency services at the bargaining table; however, there's been a lack of willingness by management to address these services during contract negotiations. That's why MSEA-SEIU Field Representative **Robin Upton-Sukeforth** and I appeared before the Maine Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee on Jan. 25 for a discussion about how to improve children's emergency services.

Robin and I told the committee the State needs to develop an after-hours response program that removes daytime staff from working nights and weekends. There needs to be a dedicated after-hours team that handles all matters after 5 p.m., on weekends and holidays. Doing so would substantially decrease the massive overtime that frontline staff are required to work and help limit burnout. We also told the committee the State must invest in real support systems and training for frontline staff.

Shortly after that meeting, the Mills administration announced its proposed Supplemental Budget will address the need for dedicated night and weekend shifts for child protective caseworkers. This is a welcome announcement. We look forward to seeing and evaluating a formal proposal.

When we tell our stories, people listen. With the proposed Supplemental State Budget, we have an opportunity to tell our stories about the need to fund not just dedicated night and weekend shifts for caseworkers but also to address other key problems all of us have identified in the delivery of public services. Thanks to members mobilizing



President's
Column —
Dean
Staffieri

during our contract campaign last year, we made progress on the pay gap, including raising the minimum starting wage to \$15 an hour, but it's not nearly enough to correct years of cuts and stagnation. Join me in calling on Governor **Janet Mills**, our **state legislators** and members of the **Appropriations Committee** to fund closing the pay gap in the Supplemental Budget. Use this link to write to them: bitly.com/FundClosingThePayGap. Tell them your personal story about why the pay gap must be closed. See Page 1 for details.

FIX THE WRONGS INFLICTED ON RETIREES

The Supplemental Budget also is our opportunity to help **retired state workers and retired teachers** catch up with the rising cost of living. We're calling on the 130th Legislature to allocate funding in the Supplemental Budget for a full 5.4% retiree cost of living adjustment. We're supporting LDs 1227 and 1413 treating MainePERS pensions the same as Social Security for state income tax purposes. Go to bit.ly/FixTheWrongs to ask Maine's elected leaders to fix the wrongs inflicted on retirees. Again, tell them your personal story. See Page 9 for details.

SUPPORT LD 1626 FOR TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

Members of our Board of Directors have endorsed LD 1626, which would address longstanding issues with the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act. We stand in solidarity with the tribes asking to be treated like all other 570 federally recognized tribes in the United States. LD 1626 is necessary for the tribes to address issues like healthcare, criminal jurisdiction on tribal lands, education, and the rights to enact and enforce environmental quality controls.

"There's a lot of work to do to make sure every Maine worker is respected, protected and paid fairly for their work, and we have some real opportunities this year to make that happen. I'm excited to be a part of it."

—Cal Paquet,
MSEA-SEIU Vice President

Cal Paquet fills vacancy for MSEA-SEIU vice presidency

Following last fall's resignation of MSEA-SEIU Vice President **Allison Perkins**, who left state service before beginning her second term as our vice president, the MSEA-SEIU Board of Directors on Jan. 3 began the process of filling that vacancy in our elected union leadership.



Cal Paquet

Per our union's Constitution and Bylaws, the Board elected **Cal Paquet** as vice president to serve until our Oct. 14-15, 2022, MSEA-SEIU Annual Meeting.

At our 2022 Annual Meeting, MSEA-SEIU delegates will then vote in a standard election for vice president with the winner serving until Dec. 31, 2023 – the remainder of Allison's term.

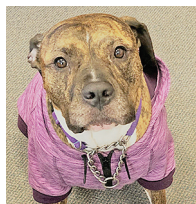
An MSEA-SEIU Chief Steward and President of our Maine Turnpike Authority Chapter, Cal works as the E-ZPass Fulfillment and Print Room Coordinator for the Maine Turnpike Authority, where he's worked for over 21 years.

"There's a lot of work to do to make sure every Maine worker is respected, protected and paid fairly for their work, and we have some real opportunities this year to make that happen," Cal said. "I'm excited to be a part of it."

Lillian's Corner

Hi there. It's your Pitty-Pal Lillian checking in again! With Groundhog Day passing us, I did my best to bargain an agreement where as the folks who love winter can continue to get their snow and cool weather and those desperately seeking an early spring and sunny summer can also be delighted. I thought that my relationship with Phil would allow for a memorandum of agreement, perhaps allowing for 3 more weeks of winter as a reasonable compromise. Phil reported that there will be six more weeks of winter; however, he is now willing to bargain a more reasonable plan. He has agreed to allow the mountains to continue to get snow and cold temperatures whereas the rest of the state will continue to warm up, the sun will shine brighter and longer, and in short time I will not need to wear my purple hoodie! I pray this settlement is to your liking. I was reminded, in my negotiations with Punxsutawney Phil, that we can't allow the powerful elite to push us around and divide us. We succeed when we recognize our fates are linked! Until next time, virtual hugs and slobbery kisses.

Love Always, Lillian



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Encouraging us to speak with a united voice.



With members at Fleet Services.



With Rep. Heidi Brooks at the State House.

Remembering Sister Donna Doore

Members share their memories of a true legend among us

Jonathan French: I remember Donna was one of the first to welcome me as an activist in MSEA, encouraging me to become a member leader myself. I also enjoyed seeing and talking with her at the State House when she was a member and then again as a Representative. She was a fighter, but her smile and positivity, regardless of circumstances, will be what I remember most. Rest in power, Donna, and thank you for all that you did for our union and Maine working families.

Cynthia Oakes: Donna was a very welcoming person. Always made time to talk when she saw us at the Statehouse. She will be missed.

Ginette Rivard: It was my first Annual Meeting as a pretty new union member. And there was this woman at the microphone shaping the discussion, offering amendments, etc. Who was this sister with the purple beret? No idea. But I knew she was someone I should pay attention to. Over time I actually met this wonderful woman. We served on committees together. We traveled to SEIU Convention together. We worked on campaigns together. I learned so much from her. We became friends. And that first impression of her never faded. You fought a good fight, always reassuring everyone that you were fine and it would all turn out okay. I don't know how to make this okay. But I will do my best to remember the lessons you taught us and live up to them. Rest in power Donna.

Ginne Hebert: Donna was a great person to have your back and she will be missed.



With her union siblings at the State House.



Showing solidarity at the Western Maine Labor Council's 2014 Labor Day BBQ in Lewiston with then-Congressman Mike Michaud, center, and her husband, Tom Doore.

Few individuals have done so much for all Maine workers, active and retired, for so long as the late State Rep. **Donna Doore**. A longtime member of our union, both as a career public servant and more recently as a retiree, Rep. Doore of Augusta died Jan. 31, after a long battle with cancer. Our condolences go to her family, friends and colleagues at this difficult time.

Rep. Doore symbolized public service in everything she did. A longtime public servant and community leader, she served on the Augusta School Board from 1995 through 2000, on the Augusta City Council from 2001 through 2009, and, in retirement, as a state representative for Maine House District 85 representing part of Augusta since 2014. She loved the city of Augusta and all of its residents, and they loved her back.

During her 34 years of service at the Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles, she advocated for MSEA-SEIU members as a union steward, member political organizer, member of PASER (Political Action by Service Employees and Retirees), a member of our Board of Directors, a member of the State Employee Health Commission, and as a secretary and chapter delegate of our Motor Vehicle Chapter. As a member of our union, she was always a strong advocate for fair contracts and state budgets.

As a state legislator, she was a fierce advocate for quality, affordable healthcare, retirement security, Maine's paid sick leave law, and raising Maine's minimum wage. As a member of the Legislature's State and Local Government Committee, she made sure the voice of public workers was heard in all of her decision making.

In retirement, she advocated for all of us as a member of our Area II Retirees Chapter. We will always remember her advocacy for all of us. Rest in Power, Sister Donna Doore!

Representational Services Roundup —

Preble Street: After Preble workers organized and took a stand about the loss of hazard pay at the beginning of January, we have been getting ready for negotiations. We have had huge participation both in the bargaining survey and 35 out of 170 total workers volunteered to be a part of bargaining committee and contract action team. In response to organizing and pressure, Preble Street gave an opening proposal on wages that is not enough improvement but is a start toward a fair contract. Over the objections of management's attorney, the bargaining team was joined by dozens of supportive coworkers in their first two negotiation sessions as they presented proposals on wages, diversity/equity and inclusion, workplace safety and staffing, training and a voice on the job. Preble Street workers are fired up to fight for a fair contract!

ACLU of Maine: Workers at the ACLU are stepping up pressure as management continues to drag their feet at the table. In a message to the management, team workers stated: "Your continued failure to appear to listen to our responses, reflect our priorities and make significant movement towards a final CBA is unacceptable....Insultingly, you include in your proposals a child care 'benefit' we have made clear would not be helpful and does not address our concerns, while have still not given a serious counter on wages....By the end of July, we had presented all of our proposed articles. Despite having contracted with an experienced attorney, you have had excuse after excuse for stalling the process." Next, ACLU workers are taking the campaign public to make sure management knows that this sort of stalling won't stand.

City of Auburn: Members who work for the City of Auburn are gearing up for contract bargaining; their current contract expires June 30, 2022. They've completed surveys on their bargaining priorities. The bargaining team members will meet at the end of February to develop proposals and discuss bargaining goals and strategies.



Members at Preble Street and the ACLU give bargaining updates to the Southern Maine Labor Council on Feb. 2 via Zoom. Preble Street workers are fired up to fight for a fair contract! ACLU workers are taking the campaign public to make sure management knows that stalling won't stand.

Child Development Services: MSEA-SEIU members at Child Development have been bargaining since October of 2021 for successor contracts to the ones that expired Dec. 31, 2021. Bargaining team members **Laurie Brown, Diane Rowe, Jakey Nadeau, Brittany Deschaine** and **Erin Leaman-Farley** are negotiating both the Professional and Support bargaining unit contracts in coalition. They are determined to secure fair raises, including steps, remote work, paid parental leave and language to protect workers from discrimination. As part of their contract campaign, they're holding Visibility Days in support of a fair contract. They also petitioned CDS management demanding a contract that addresses their priorities. Details: Page 5.

Executive Branch hazard pay grievance settlement: Last month, we settled our class action grievance concerning the hazard pay agreements between MSEA and the Executive Branch of the State of Maine. The settlement relates to our Department of Corrections, Dorothea Dix and Riverview, Bureau of General Services and OADS Crisis Team agreements.

Bates Educators and Staff Organization — 'We are ready to move forward as a union'

Dear Colleagues,

These past few weeks, we had countless conversations and sensed the excitement, in every program and department, about driving Bates forward through our union. Right now, we are feeling very grounded, grateful, and motivated by the knowledge that so many of us are ready to come together to build a better Bates. **Based on such great feedback - we feel confident that an overwhelming number of us stepped up and voted YES!**

After the National Labor Relations Board heard ample testimony from the Bates administration—for 3 out of the 4 days devoted to hearings in November—the NLRB nevertheless ruled in December to approve our vote for a union that includes all of us. Unfortunately, and a full two weeks after the NLRB ruled to approve our unit, the administration demanded a review of the NLRB's decision, to push back against our choice and try to divide us from each other right before our opportunity to vote.

Although the Bates administration's demand for a review of our wall-to-wall unit did not impact the timeline for us to send in our ballots, it will unfortunately delay our vote count until the NLRB makes a decision on whether the College's argument has enough merit to conduct a formal review.

Our view is simple:

This vote was our chance to make our own decision on forming our union together. We have cast our ballots. It's time for the administration and their expensive consultants to stop playing legal games, respect our decision, and get out of the way of the NLRB counting our ballots. The College should honor their commitment to respect our choice: stop telling us one thing while doing another.

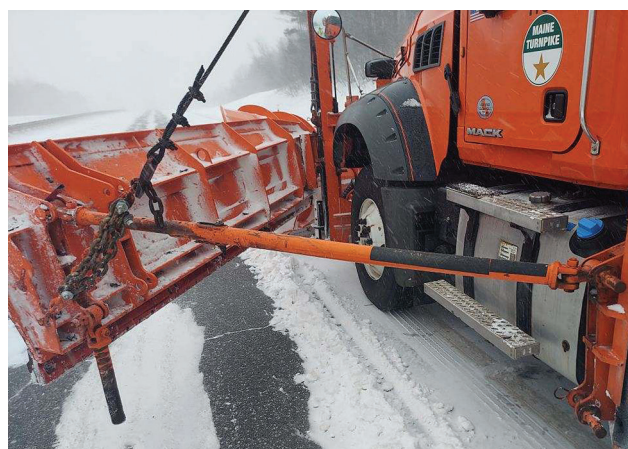
Still, we are hopeful the Board will allow our vote count to proceed soon, so we can finalize the formal recognition of our union and start the process of negotiating a first contract that meets our needs as Bates College employees.

In the meantime, we are ready to move forward as a union, start to tackle the issues and concerns all of us share, and begin to prepare for negotiations—so once the Board counts our ballots, we are ready to bring everyone's voices to the negotiations table.

Sincerely,

*Bates Educators and Staff Organization
Organizing Committee*

Give our Snowfighters the room they need!



Maine State Police report that during the blizzard Jan. 29 on the Maine Turnpike in Lewiston, the driver of the pickup at left was in the passing lane and traveling too fast for road conditions when he came upon a Maine Turnpike Authority plow truck. The driver of the pickup attempted to go around the plow on the median side where there was no room. He then hit the left wing of the plow causing it to bend back and puncture the tank that holds the brine solution used to treat the roads. There were no injuries. Give our Snowfighters the room they need!



Bobbi Jo Bishop



Hannah Whitmore
and daughter



Laurie Brown

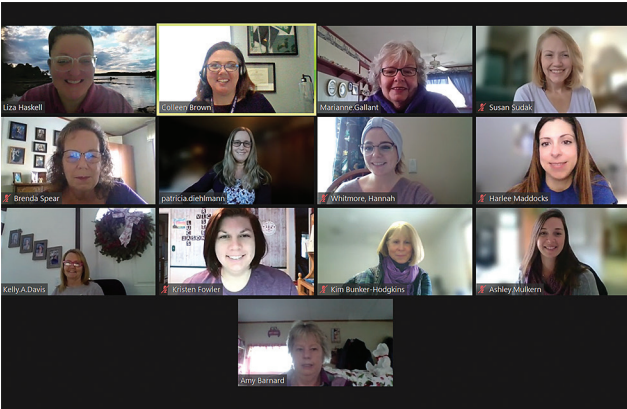


Lindsey LaForge
and daughter



Solidarity!

CDS workers mobilize for fair contract



Solidarity at Child Development Services!

Petition to the Management Team at Child Development Services (CDS)

We, the CDS workers signed below, demand a fair contract that includes the following core priorities:

1. Fair Raises: Including steps to help retain current staff!
2. Remote Work: We deserve a fair, transparent and clear process to apply for remote and hybrid schedules.
3. Paid Parental Leave: CDS workers have families, too, and we should support them at this critical time in a child's life.
4. Discrimination: Bullying and harassment have no place at CDS!

Sincerely,

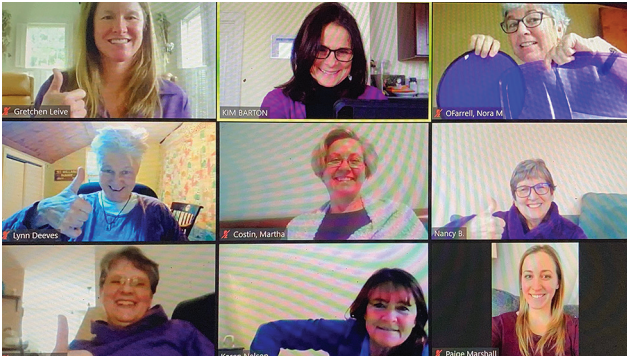
Meg Sigovich
Sally Nicol
Tammy Talbot
Carin Sarzynski
Margaret Hunter
Hannah Whitmore
DawnMarie Clark
Harlee Maddocks
Dianne Rowe
Teresa Barbieri
Brittany Deschaine
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Amy Atkinson
Stacey Crane
Jill Rolins
Amy Barnard
Kristen Burwood
MacGregor Stocco
Yvonne Carter
Michelle Wilbar
Janine Bona-Alford
Sheila Stuart
Amber Bradigan
Patti Thomas
Leanne Gerrish
Christine Spear
Leanne Gerrish
Nancy McKinney
Kathryn Jeffcoats
Laura Mellits
Elizabeth Wood
Lana Bennett
Kim Barton
Sherry Cotta
Kristen Cosgrove
William Partridge
Sara Butler
Bre Girard

Jacqueline Nadeau
Jennifer Robinson
Mary Wall
Mary Lambert
Suzanne Elcik
Ruth-ann Lavoie
Marianne Gallant
Sally Group
Tina Durant
Miranda Sheltra
Kari Jenkins
Sarah Bruce
Nina Bradstreet
Erin Zietz
Eleanor Gettman
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Lindsey LaForge
Patti Miller
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Carol Labbe
Caitlin Dyke
Laura Crossley-Marra
Babette Law
Jen Marchant
Sarah Meuse
Kelly Harvey
Sharon Francis
Bobbi-Jo Bishop
Amy Barnard
Liza Haskell
Caitlin Whittemore
Jodi Bennett
Terri Bronder
Olivia Merrill
Angela Redding
Laura Kutch
Lauren Maloney
Jennifer Metcalfe
Lisa Rubin
Erin McOsker
Kristine Cosgrove
Bethan Jones
Brigitte Teachout
Suzanne Blouin

Doriann Bowden
Terry McLaughlin
Chrissy Chonko
Mary Mathieson
Rebecca Werner
Elizabeth Wood
Elizabeth Beaulieu
Kathryn Broadbent
Gina Medina
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Carol Lachapelle
Jamie Morgan
Victoria Beetel
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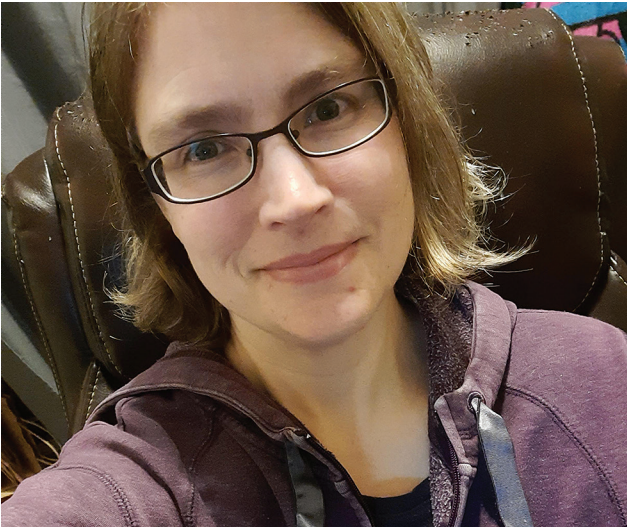
Erin Leaman-Farley, Elena Kiyanitsa, Sally
Group and Sarah Snow



United for a fair contract at CDS!



Fighting for paid parental leave!



Purple on Visibility Days!



Kristen Cosgrove

Demanding respect for school workers in Maine's unorganized territories

State's termination of workers' insurance every summer fuels recruitment, retention crisis

On Jan. 11, we testified in support of LD 1780, An Act to Allow Unorganized Territory School Staff to Receive Annualized Pay, Sponsored by Representative **Michelle Dunphy**.

This legislation is a necessary first step for the State of Maine to begin addressing a critical problem impacting workers and the services they provide in the three State-run schools in Maine's unorganized territories: **Connor Consolidated School** in Aroostook County; **Edmunds Consolidated School** in Washington County; and **Kingman Elementary School** in Penobscot County.

These State-run schools exist because the townships lack the tax base and community resources necessary for residents to operate their own local school districts. For these three townships, there aren't any school boards making decisions or hearing from parents about concerns they might have. Instead, the Maine Department of Education runs all three schools under state law.

When it comes to their pay structure and benefits, the workers at Connor Consolidated School, Edmunds Consolidated School and Kingman Elementary School are treated extremely poorly compared to employees in Maine's public school districts – and the administration has informed us the starting point to address the disparate treatment is to pass legislation like LD 1780.

The problem LD 1780 would fix is that while workers in Maine's public school districts have the option of spreading their paychecks over the full calendar year, the workers at these three State-run schools are paid, and considered employed, only during the actual school year. This is a real problem and it puts school workers in Maine's unorganized territories at a disadvantage compared to workers in public school districts especially when it comes to the employer share of the workers' health, dental and vision insurance premiums.

By having the option to be paid year-round, public school district employees in Maine can

"Unlike employees in the Maine public school districts, on the last day of every school year, workers at these three State-run schools brace for the State terminating their health insurance until the start of the next school year."

— **Robin Upton-Sukeforth**,
MSEA-SEIU Field Representative



Members of the Legislature's Education and Cultural Affairs Committee listen to our testimony for LD 1780 in support of the workers at Maine's three State-run schools in the unorganized territories.

get the employer-paid portion of their premiums year-round; this ensures continuous, uninterrupted insurance coverage for them, their spouses or partners and dependents. But that's not the case for workers at the State-run Connor, Edmunds and Kingman schools. For all workers but teachers and teaching principals at these three rural Maine schools, on the last day of each school year, the State completely ceases paying the employer share of all insurance premiums. The State doesn't resume paying its share of the premiums until the first day of the next school year.

In order to avoid losing their insurance every summer, the workers at Connor, Edmunds and Kingman schools must pay 100 percent of the COBRA premiums, out of their own pockets, all summer until the next school year begins. Those out-of-pocket COBRA costs can approach or exceed \$5,000 per worker each summer. In fact, a worker's COBRA costs could go as high as \$7,728.60 for the entire summer just to continue family COBRA health, dental and vision insurance for three months. That's on top of the employee share of premiums paid via biweekly payroll deduction during the school year.

MSEA-SEIU Member **Trudy Newcomb**, teaching principal at Edmunds Consolidated School, said, "My staff would prefer to schedule regular preventative appointments during the summer months when they are not working to avoid having to use sick time and missing work during the school year; however it is not possible as their insurance is not reinstated until September. This is counterproductive to the smooth running of the school as subs are very difficult to find, especially now."

"The State's suspension of the employer share of insurance premiums every summer creates enormous medical and financial problems for these workers, all of whom are low-wage workers," MSEA-SEIU Field Representative **Robin Upton-Sukeforth** told the committee. "On the last day of every school year, workers at these three schools brace for the State terminating their health insurance until the start of the next school year."

As we've seen throughout Maine State Government due to state workers being substantially underpaid compared to their private-sector counterparts,

"My staff would prefer to schedule regular preventative appointments during the summer months when they are not working to avoid having to use sick time and missing work during the school year; however it is not possible as their insurance is not reinstated until September. This is counterproductive to the smooth running of the school as subs are very difficult to find, especially now."

— **Trudy Newcomb**,
MSEA-SEIU member, Teaching Principal,
Edmunds Consolidated School

there's a real public-employee recruitment and retention problem at these State-run schools. The Department of Education's website under job openings at these schools states, "Substitute Teachers, Cooks and Bus Drivers are always needed."

Many of the impacted workers don't even get scheduled for 40 hours a week. Their job titles include: Janitor/Bus Driver (yes, that's one position covering both jobs); Teacher Aides; Substitute Teachers; Cooks; and Office Assistants. The pay has been so low for so long that for a Janitor/Bus Driver, the first six steps of their pay scale last month just increased to the \$15-an-hour minimum starting wage for state workers our bargaining team secured in our most recent contract negotiations with the Mills administration. The first four pay steps for Teacher's Aide increased to \$15 an hour for the same reason. Some of these workers simply cannot afford the COBRA premiums, so they go without insurance every summer. In fact, the only way most workers at these State-run schools can keep their insurance each summer is to find summer jobs so they can pay the COBRA premiums. Some are literally working every summer, after working the entire school year, just to pay COBRA premiums until the day the State resumes paying its share of the premiums. Some also are worried about upcoming summer job prospects, especially during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Passing and enacting LD 1780 in itself won't solve this problem; rather, doing so merely would let the workers and the Mills administration negotiate over a solution through the collective bargaining process. This needs to happen as soon as possible not just for the good of the workers and their families but also for the students and parents who count on these State-run schools to provide them with the best K-12 public education possible.

Over 100 Riverview, Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center workers: Respect us, protect us, pay us!

Proposed stipend of \$3 an hour would address emergency recruitment, retention problem

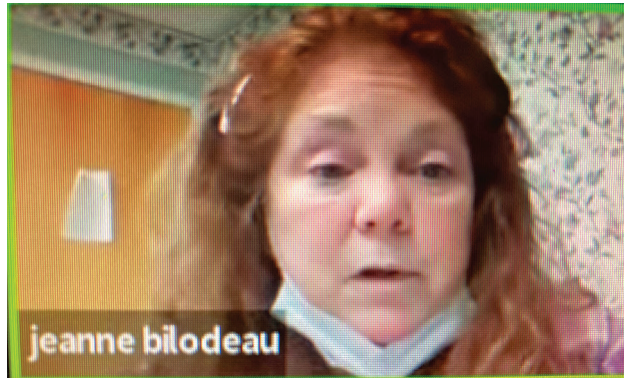
Over 100 workers at Maine's two state psychiatric hospitals on Jan. 18 told the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee about the difficult and dangerous working conditions they encounter every day in their jobs. They told their stories in support of LD 1792, emergency legislation that is proposed to be amended to provide a \$3 an hour, across-the-board raise to all workers at Riverview Psychiatric Center in Augusta and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center in Bangor, along with their respective Outpatient Services Teams.

We testified in support of LD 1792, sponsored by Rep. **Seth Berry**, and in support of amending it to cover workers at both hospitals and their Outpatient Services Teams. Committee members listened to us; on Feb. 2, a majority on the committee voted "ought to pass" on an amended LD 1792, so the legislation will proceed to the Maine House of Representatives for votes.

LD 1792 is necessary because the ongoing public employee recruitment and retention problem in Maine State Government does in fact constitute an emergency. The public employee recruitment and retention problem is particularly acute at Riverview and Dorothea Dix for workers in job classifications such as intensive case managers (ICMs) and acuity specialists.

"I work for Riverview Outpatient Services," MSEA-SEIU Member and Intensive Case Manager **Bobbi Bard** wrote in her testimony. "The team works with around 60 clients that have been found not criminally responsible (NCR) by reason of insanity as a result of mental disease or disability. Out of 59 NCR clients, 17 have killed one or more people and an additional 27 clients have committed other violent offenses including assault, aggravated assault, elevated aggravated assault, and attempted murder. The remaining 15 clients have committed child molestation, child pornography, visual child aggression, criminal threatening, terrorizing, stalking, criminal mischief, and/or arson. We are tasked with keeping the client and society safe. Team members monitor clients' compliance with their court orders, support development of client skills and independence, and assess clients' symptoms and safety. As part of these responsibilities, it is the team's duty to observe and supervise clients while they are in their homes and in the community - often while working alone and without nearby backup."

Continuing, Bobbi Bard told the legislators, "I was on the team when a client was shot 3 times in our lobby and I have been assaulted. This job is not for the faint of heart. This job can be dangerous at times - just like it can be at Riverview, where the staff are underpaid and greatly understaffed. With recent wage increases in other fields, many jobs involving



MSEA-SEIU Member Jeanne Bilodeau works in Outpatient Services at Riverview. She previously worked at Riverview as an acuity specialist. She said a lot of Riverview workers have been hurt due to understaffing. "They work 12 hours a day, no breaks sometimes, because there's no one to relieve you," she told legislators, adding that workers often are called names, spat upon and assaulted. "It's not like your typical job."

Rep. **Seth Berry**, sponsor of LD 1792, told the legislators a personal story highlighting the low wages of Riverview workers and the need for immediate legislative action to raise their wages:

"During the summer and fall of 2020 and 2021, my 16- and then 17-year-old son worked as a dockhand, busboy and gas pump monkey at a tavern and marina in Bath. He worked full time, and had no particular credentials for the job. For that work he took home \$15 per hour plus tips - averaging well over \$22 per hour in total.

"At Riverview, I am told the starting pay is \$15.71 for a Mental Health Worker 1, plus a temporary \$2 stipend. For a person with an MA, the pay starts at \$20.87, plus a temporary 60 cent stipend. In other words, my teenage son has been earning more for the past two years than someone with a master's degree earns today at Riverview. Given the importance of their work and the challenges these workers face, it is imperative that we do better."

significantly less risk now pay equally well if not better. The \$3 pay adjustment will help recruit and retain more employees and will help offset recent dramatic increases in the cost of living. It is time for Riverview and Riverview Outpatient Services to be compensated for the dangerousness of their work. Please vote yes to LD 1792 and show all employees at RPC and RPC OPS that the good work that we do is noticed and appreciated."

MSEA-SEIU Member **Jeanne Bilodeau** works in Outpatient Services at Riverview. She previously worked at Riverview as an acuity specialist. She said a lot of Riverview workers have been hurt due to understaffing. "They work 12 hours a day, no breaks sometimes, because there's no one to relieve you," she told legislators, adding that workers often are

"I was on the team when a client was shot 3 times in our lobby and I have been assaulted. This job is not for the faint of heart. This job can be dangerous at times - just like it can be at Riverview, where the staff are underpaid and greatly understaffed.

With recent wage increases in other fields, many jobs involving significantly less risk now pay equally well if not better. The \$3.00 pay adjustment will help recruit and retain more employees and will help offset recent dramatic increases in the cost of living. "

—Bobbi Bard,

MSEA-SEIU member, Intensive Case Manager for Maine DHHS

called names, spat upon and assaulted. "It's not like your typical job."

During the hearing, Senator **Joe Baldacci** called for amending LD 1792 so that it covers workers at both Riverview and its Outpatient Services Team, and Dorothea Dix and its Outpatient Services Team. We supported that amendment.

The workers at Riverview and Dorothea Dix and their respective Outpatient Services clearly do difficult and dangerous work in support of Maine's most vulnerable citizens, yet the State has consistently fallen short when it comes to respecting, protecting and paying them fairly for their labor. We continue to demand the State make progress on addressing the low-wages that Maine State Government pays State employees. State employees make 15% less than their counterparts throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional pay differences, according to the State of Maine Market Study Report dated Nov. 20, 2020.

To be sure, in contract bargaining in 2021, members of our Executive Branch bargaining team sought to address the state employee pay gap with the Mills administration. However, the administration during those negotiations refused to even acknowledge the pay gap on grounds that a full state employee compensation and classification study has not yet been completed. In fact, the administration began those negotiations without proposing any pay raise whatsoever for State employees. While our bargaining team and the administration ultimately made some progress on addressing the state employee pay gap by reaching agreement on a new two-year contract, much work remains to address the pay gap.

Apply: 2022 MSEA-SEIU scholarships

Applications and all required info must be received at MSEA-SEIU headquarters by April 15

One of the benefits of MSEA-SEIU membership is our union's scholarship program. We have 10 scholarships to award in 2022:

- Seven are for full-time students who are dependents of dues-paying MSEA-SEIU members;
- Three are for MSEA-SEIU members continuing their education.

Instructions and requirements, along with scholarship forms, are all here: bit.ly/MSEAFORMS

Our MSEA-SEIU scholarships are:

- **MSEA-SEIU 2022 Full-Time Student Scholarships.** Seven scholarships ranging from \$750 to \$1,500 apiece are available for students who have one of the following relationships



Leah Collins, daughter of Stanley Collins Jr. of our Local 1 Chapter, won our 2021 George A. Davala Scholarship (\$1,000) and our 2021 MSEA-SEIU Area I Community College Scholarship (\$750). Leah is attending Eastern Maine Community College.

with a dues-paying MSEA-SEIU member: son or daughter of an MSEA member; stepchild of an MSEA member; son or daughter of the MSEA member's significant other who resides with the MSEA member in accordance with the sick leave article of the Executive Branch contract; student who is under legal guardianship of an MSEA member; and/or grandchild of an MSEA

member who resides with the grandparent. Applicants must be entering full-time post-secondary educational or vocational programs for the first time as freshmen.

- **MSEA-SEIU 2022 Member (Part-Time Student) Scholarships.** Three \$500 scholarships, one for each of the three MSEA Areas, are for MSEA-SEIU members enrolled in educational programs. These scholarships are for members who furthering their education either on a part-time basis while employed OR on a full-time basis after obtaining an educational leave of absence

Applications and all required data for all scholarships must be received at MSEA-SEIU headquarters by April 15, 2022. Instructions and requirements, along with scholarship forms, are all here: bit.ly/MSEAFORMS

Questions? Contact MSEA-SEIU Member Benefits Manager **Luanne Collins** at 622-3151 or Luanne.Collins@mseaseiu.org

Strengthen labor education in Maine

On Jan. 11, we testified in support of LD 1816, An Act to Promote Labor Education Through the University of Maine System, Presented by House Speaker **Ryan Fecteau**.

There's a real need for all Mainers to have access to labor history as the state's workforce builds and adapts to meet current and future needs. The establishment of the Maine Bureau of Labor Education in Orono as a department of the University of Maine's Division of Lifelong Learning in 1966 was a great first step in making Maine labor history accessible to all of us. The bureau's official charge from the University of Maine Trustees is to use research, teaching and public service to make "appropriate and specialized programs available to members of the Maine labor force, both organized and unorganized."

LD 1816 builds on the bureau's excellent work by establishing the Dr. Charles A. Scontras Labor Center at the University of Southern Maine.

Charlie Scontras, who died March 7, 2021, at age 91, was a labor historian who served as a professor for the University of Maine for 36 years and as a research associate for the Maine Bureau of Labor Education. He authored of over a dozen books, including "Organized Labor in Maine: Twentieth Century Origins," "Organizing Labor and Labor Politics in Maine, 1880-1890" and "Two Decades of Organized Labor and Labor Politics in Maine, 1880-1900."

The Dr. Charles A. Scontras Center would provide Maine people with community-based labor education, research and outreach through workshops, symposiums, skill-based learning and applied research. It would expand access to labor education in Maine and help current and future Maine workers understand their history.

Thank you Representative Pingree and Representative Golden!

The Freedom to Vote Act & John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act passed the House of Representatives



We applaud your work for Protecting our Democracy!



TAKE ACTION TODAY

CALL SENATORS NOW TO END THE FILIBUSTER
1-833-312-1833



A decade after LePage and the Legislature cut our pensions, we're falling further behind

By **Ginette Rivard**
and **Penny Whitney-Asdourian**

The pensions of all retired state workers and public-school teachers in Maine are under threat once again.

A decade ago, in 2011, former Governor **Paul LePage** and the **125th Maine Legislature** eviscerated the public employee pensions of state workers and retirees to pay for income-tax breaks mostly benefiting the wealthy and corporations:

- The normal retirement age was raised from 62 to 65 for state workers and teachers hired on or after July 1, 2006. Anyone hired since then who retires early faces a pension penalty of 6 percent a year.
- Retiree pension cost of living adjustments were frozen for three years. This put retired state workers and teachers far behind the cost of living. We still haven't caught up.
- Future retiree pension cost of living (COLA) adjustments were capped at 3 percent and limited to the first \$20,000 of pension income. Again, this put us behind the rising cost of living.

They made all of these cuts to our pensions over our fierce objections and without any regard for Maine's retired state workers and teachers, and future retirees. Many state legislators, including both Republicans and Democrats, now recognize the 2011 cuts went too far, that it was wrong to cut the pensions of retirees to pay for new income-tax breaks for the wealthy and corporations.

Yet the monthly pension cuts imposed in 2011 continue today. Coupled with the biggest spike in the cost of living our nation has seen in 40 years, those pension cuts have made it harder and harder for retired public workers in Maine to make ends meet.

At issue are the public employee pensions of retired state workers and retired public school teachers participating in the Maine Public Employees Retirement System. Governor **Janet Mills** and the 130th Maine Legislature have an obligation to protect our pensions from further decay. Many of us have struggled, and continue to struggle, to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Now is our opportunity to address the wrongs inflicted on us a decade ago. State revenue projections for 2022 are significantly higher than anticipated. The Legislature has an opportunity to address the financial harm we've endured. Passing LD 1227 for pension fairness and increasing the 2021 cost-of-living adjustment to 5.4 percent will strengthen our pensions and help us catch up with the cost of living. Without these actions, and at



Ginette Rivard



Penny Whitney-Asdourian

current trends, the purchasing power of Maine's retired public employees is expected shrink by around \$500 per year and our purchasing power would continue to erode in the years ahead.

Let's be clear: We're talking about public employee pensions we paid into through contributions of 7.65 percent from every paycheck we earned while working. Most of us don't receive Social Security; for those who do, federal laws known as the Social Security Offsets reduce or eliminate whatever Social Security we might be eligible for. For every one of us, our pension is our Social Security.

We've been working hard trying to make ends meet, but not receiving a full 5.4 percent cost of living adjustment will make it even more difficult to pay for medications, heating, housing and groceries. Instead of watching us continue to struggle, Maine's elected leaders should fund the full 5.4 percent. Doing so wouldn't put any of us ahead by even a penny; it would simply help us catch up. We're that far behind. The 130th Legislature must allocate funding for this purpose through the Supplemental

Ask state legislators and Gov. Mills: Fix the wrongs inflicted on retirees!

Ever since 2011, when former Governor **Paul LePage** cut taxes for the wealthy at the expense of MainePERS participants, many retirees have struggled to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Now is our opportunity to fix the wrongs inflicted on MainePERS retirees.

Go to bit.ly/FixTheWrongs and send a note to **Governor Janet Mills**, the Legislature's **Appropriations Committee** and **your state legislators**. Share your story and ask them to fix the wrongs inflicted on MainPERS retirees! Tell them your story and make these key points:

- **Revenue projections for 2022 are significantly higher** than anticipated.
- **The Legislature has the opportunity to start addressing the issues retirees are facing by passing LD 1227 or LD 1413** for pension fairness. Both bills are titled An Act To Provide Equity in the State Income Tax Deduction for Certain Public Employees Retirement System Pensions, sponsored by Rep. **Jan Dodge** and Sen. **Joseph Rafferty**. Currently, MainePERS pensions are taxed differently and unfairly compared to Social Security – and Mainers who worked some, or all, of their lives in public service are penalized. Both bills address this inequity by treating MainePERS pensions the same as Social Security for state income tax

purposes. Ask Maine's leaders to support these bills!

- **The Legislature also has the opportunity, via the Supplemental Budget, to increase the 2021 cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) to 5.4%.** Last year, retired state employees and teachers received a maximum cost of living increase (COLA) of 3% on the eligible portion of their pension base. However, in the previous year, inflation increased by 5.4%. Retirees have been working hard trying to make ends meet, but not receiving a full 5.4% COLA will make it even more difficult to pay for medications, heating, housing, groceries, and other means of survival. The State must fund the full 5.4%; the Legislature has an opportunity to allocate funding for this purpose through the supplemental budget.

If possible, customize your messages to share your personal story and what funding these items would mean to you. If you do customize, there are three messages on the link, so be sure you edit all three.

Again, go to bit.ly/FixTheWrongs — ask Maine's elected leaders to fix the wrongs inflicted on retirees! Pass LD 1227 or LD 1413. Fund the full 5.4% retiree pension COLA!

Governor Janet Mills and the 130th Maine Legislature have an obligation to protect our pensions from further decay. Many of us have struggled, and continue to struggle, to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Budget in 2022.

With inflation hitting peak levels since 1982, if Governor Mills and the Legislature don't fully fund our pensions, thousands of retirees will be hit harder than ever. It's time for action by Governor Mills and the Legislature. They must address not just the rising inflation's harm on us but also the damage inflicted in 2011 on our pensions. They must resolve to never again cut the pensions we earned in service to our fellow Maine citizens.

Ginette Rivard of Caribou is a past president of MSEA-SEIU Local 1989; she retired after a career with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. Penny Whitney-Asdourian of Scarborough is a retiree director for MSEA-SEIU Local 1989; she retired after a career with the Judicial Branch of Maine State Government.

They deserve inclusion in 1998 Special Retirement Plan —

Office of Medical Examiner, Crime Lab, Computer Crimes Unit workers, corrections supervisors describe grueling work

On Jan. 19, we testified in support of three legislative proposals moving certain groups of state workers into the 1998 Special Retirement Plan:

LD 1746, An Act To Expand the 1998 Special Retirement Plan To Include Employees Who Work for the Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Emergency), sponsored by Senator Craig Hickman

We appreciate the introduction of this legislation on behalf of the workers in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. The issue of who is currently included in the 1998 Special Plan and who is currently excluded from it is a real one. It impacts many public servants in our Great State of Maine, and it must be addressed immediately for the State to recruit and retain qualified workers.

We also appreciate the Labor and Housing Committee's diligence on this overall issue. Over the past three years and continuing in this short session of the 130th Maine Legislature, committee members have heard testimony from other state workers seeking inclusion in the 1998 Special Plan. Those workers are employed in the Maine State Police Crime Lab and the Computer Crimes Unit within the Maine Department of Public Safety. They have asked to be included in the 1998 Special Plan due to the exceedingly difficult work they do in service to Maine people.

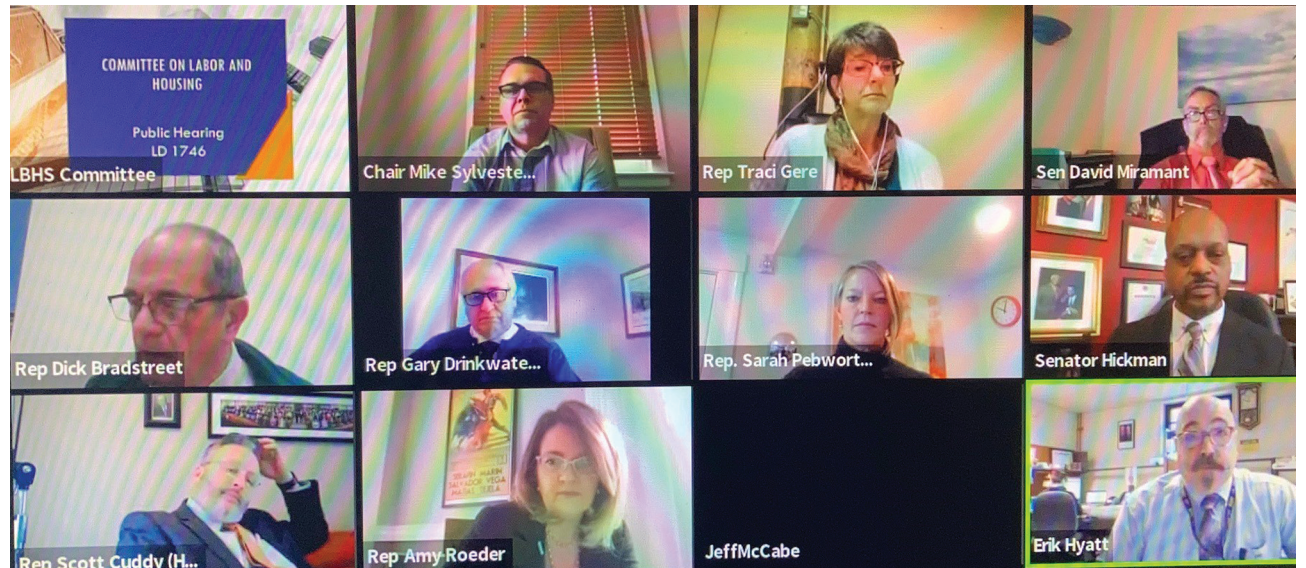
LD 1746 is similar in intent, but it seeks to include in the 1998 Special Plan those who work in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. Like their colleagues in the State Police Crime Lab and in the Computer Crimes Unit, the workers in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner also do exceedingly difficult work in their service to all Maine people.

MSEA-SEIU Member Erik Hyatt, a Medical Examiner's Assistant in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner, testified he and his coworkers deserve inclusion in the 1998 Special Plan.

"The Office of Chief Medical Examiner has a team of 12 people, currently 10, serving a state of 1.3 million people and 35,385 square miles," Erik said. "We do have 20 or so active contracted Field Medical Examiners to cover the area, but 3,970 deaths were called into the office of 12 people in 2021. 3,970, Whether its natural, due to child or elder abuse, homicide, suicide, accident, overdose, any or all circumstances."

Erik and his colleagues scheduled 1,440 exams that happened outside the facility.

As the bill's sponsor, Senator **Craig Hickman**, noted in his testimony, the job of these workers is to work with the bodies of death victims and to be in contact with their families. This is traumatic work, so it's past time for them to become eligible for the Special Plan. We suggested an amendment to ensure this legislation applies not just to future hires but to any and all workers currently employed in this particular office.



MSEA-SEIU Member Erik Hyatt, at lower left, a Medical Examiner's Assistant in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner, said he and his coworkers deserve inclusion in the 1998 Special Plan.

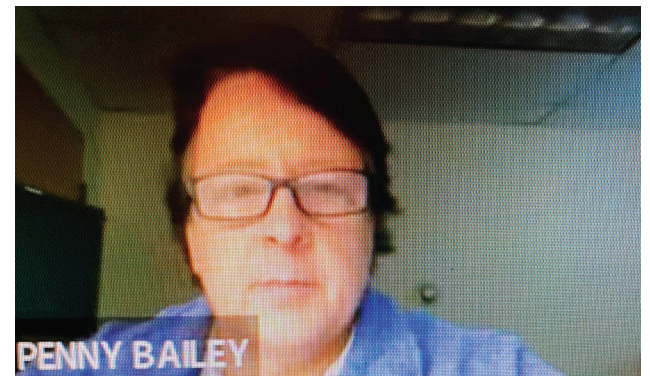
"The Office of Chief Medical Examiner has a team of 12 people, currently 10, serving a state of 1.3 million people and 35,385 square miles. We do have 20 or so active contracted Field Medical Examiners to cover the area, but 3,970 deaths were called into the office of 12 people in 2021. Whether its natural, due to child or elder abuse, homicide, suicide, accident, overdose, any or all circumstances."

— Erik Hyatt,

MSEA-SEIU member, Medical Examiner's Assistant in Office of Chief Medical Examiner

The current exclusion of workers in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner from the Special Plan is a contributing factor to the recruitment and retention problem in this particular state office; it's emblematic of the recruitment and retention problem throughout Maine State Government. We let the Labor and Housing Committee know we continue to demand immediate progress on addressing the low-wages the State of Maine pays to state employees. On average, State employees make 15% less than their counterparts throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional pay differences, according to the State of Maine Market Study Report dated Nov. 20, 2020.

In order to recruit and retain qualified employees, the State of Maine must respect them, protect them and pay them fairly for their work. Passing LD 1746



MSEA-SEIU Members Penny and Harvey Bailey, who are married, both work as Corrections Supervisors. They testified in support of LD 1840.

would be an important step toward showing the workers in the Office of Chief Medical Examiner the respect they have earned.

LD 1808, An Act to Address Employee Retention at the Maine State Police Crime Laboratory and the Computer Crimes Unit in the Department of Public Safety (Emergency), sponsored by Senator Bill Diamond

Last year, the Legislature enacted LD 1101, but it applied only to State Police Crime Lab and Computer Crimes Unit workers hired after Sept. 30, 2021, by making them eligible for the 1998 Special Retirement Plan. Any civilian workers in either of these units employed at the time of LD 1101's passage, as well as any workers hired on or before Sept. 30, 2021, in either unit, were excluded from the enacted LD 1101.

As a result, LD 1808 would eliminate those exclusions. Many of these workers have testified in 2019 and again in 2021 seeking to be heard. They

Please see **GRUELING WORK**, Page 11

Roberta de Araujo, Jim Mackie confirmed for Maine Labor Relations Board

At our urging, the Maine Senate has confirmed former MSEA-SEIU staffer **Roberta de Araujo** and former AFSCME staff representative **Jim Mackie** to the Maine Labor Relations Board.

All Maine workers deserve board members whom they can count on to administer and enforce state laws governing collective bargaining for public sector employees and employers. Roberta's lifetime of work and service in all of her many capacities over the past five decades make her eminently qualified to serve as the Maine Labor Relations Board member representing labor.

Roberta has a long history of advocating for public workers, including two stints with MSEA-SEIU Local 1989. First, from 1985 through 1990, she

served as general counsel and as attorney/negotiator for our union. And then from 2005 to 2010, she returned as general counsel. During both of these stints, she was an integral part of our management team, directed our legal strategy, bargained contracts, advised on legislation, and supervised a large number of employees.

From 1990 through 2005, Roberta served as a neutral arbitrator and mediator based in Hallowell, Maine. In 2010, she joined the law firm now known as Johnson, Webbert & Garvan, and in 2019 became a sole practitioner. Over the last 10 years, she has remained actively involved in labor law, representing various labor unions in Maine, including MSEA, as well as individual union

members and individual employees.

For many years, both the members and staff of my union have work well with Jim Mackie in his capacity as a Staff Representative for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSMCE) Council 93, and collaborated with him on issues impacting both quality services and workers on issues like recruitment and retention, safety and COVID-19.

Jim's knowledge and understanding of public structures, including services provided by workers in the Maine Department of Corrections and at the state psychiatric hospitals within the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, is substantial.

GRUELING WORK

Continued from Page 10

have provided deeply personal testimony, much of it traumatic for them to recount, to help inform the Labor and Housing Committee's decision making, so we're encouraged to see bipartisan committee support for LD 1808.

Unless the current statute is amended by legislation like LD 1808, the workers who have been doing this work for years will not be able to retire before their normal retirement age of 62 or 65 without facing a 6% annual penalty. Their only option to limit their exposure to the traumatic and graphic content they handle on a daily basis would be to retire early and face significant cuts to the retirement benefits they have worked so hard to earn.

The non-law-enforcement workers at the State Police Crime Lab and at the Computer Crimes Unit possess a unique skill set and do gruesome work. Much of what they do is about protecting children.

LD 1808 is about setting things right for these often unknown and unseen workers in both the State Police Crime Lab and the Computer Crimes Unit. They do much of the same work as law-enforcement officers such as detectives or special agents. They often must wear hazmat suits while doing their jobs, which includes collecting evidence at all hours, day or night, weekdays and weekends.

Their work takes a toll on them as workers, as private citizens, as spouses or partners, as parents. With their "constant exposure to violence and death," as one of the workers has described their jobs, only one scientist in the State Police Crime Lab has made it to normal retirement age in the past 38 years. It's past time we stopped expecting these workers to do this work until their normal retirement age. It's past time to include all of these workers in the 1998 Special Retirement Plan.

LD 1840, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Retirement Benefit Reductions for Corrections Supervisors Currently Included in the 1998 Special Plan, sponsored by Senate President Troy Jackson

LD 1840 addresses a needed correction from legislation passed in 2021, which has created an

"Corrections is a difficult career field which becomes much more difficult as we age. The life expectancy for correctional staff is 58. I turned 59 in December and can't retire without penalties until I'm 62 – 4 years beyond the life expectancy of a corrections professional. The cumulative effects of decades spent in high stress environments can lead to significant mental and physical issues."

— **Harvey Bailey**,
MSEA-SEIU member,
Corrections Supervisor

equity issue involving Corrections Supervisors employed in the Maine Department of Corrections.

The Legislature last year enacted LD 190 removing the early-retirement penalties for Correctional Officers. That legislation covered certain Corrections officers (Guards) in the 1998 Special Plan who receive a direct-care stipend and who are covered by the AFSCME union. However, that enacted legislation didn't remove the same early-retirement penalties for Corrections Supervisors, whom we represent.

In most cases, these Corrections Supervisors have been promoted from other positions within Corrections, and in many cases from Corrections Officers to Supervisors. In doing so, these Correctional Supervisors, Unit Managers, Juvenile Program Managers and other supervisory positions are now left out of the fix that LD 190 was meant to correct. These Corrections Supervisors, who aren't covered by LD 190, work in direct care and security, and work in the housing units with the same workers who benefited from the passage of LD 190.

Among those also testifying in support of LD 1840 were MSEA-SEIU Members Penny and Harvey Bailey, who are married; both work as Corrections Supervisors.

"I was promoted to Correctional Captain in 2001. This in no way reduced the amount of time I spent in direct contact with the prisoner population," Harvey Bailey wrote in his testimony. "I find it to be unfair that one union was granted a fix to their retirement and the other was not. Corrections is a difficult career field which becomes much more difficult as we age. The life expectancy for correctional staff is 58. I turned 59 in December and can't retire without penalties until I'm 62 – 4 years beyond the life expectancy of a corrections professional. The cumulative effects of decades spent in high stress environments can lead to significant mental and physical issues. The rates of PTSD, heart disease and substance abuse suffered by correctional staff is the reason why AFSCME members were granted this retirement fix. Please consider granting MSEA Supervisory staff the consideration."

Fortunately, there is a solution to this inequity. LD 1840 would remove the early-retirement penalties for Corrections Supervisors who are stuck in a loophole that did not get fixed last year.

LD 1840 would address the inequity of Corrections Supervisors in the 1998 Special Plan facing early-retirement penalties even though they are technically included in the Special Plan.

Retirement is a contributing factor to the serious retention problems the Maine DOC is experiencing; it's emblematic of the retention problem throughout Maine State Government. This is a small fix for a fraction of employees that would have a positive impact. We expect to propose much-needed changes in 2023 to address larger concerns in retirement for state employees.

In order to recruit and retain qualified employees, the State of Maine must respect them, protect them and pay them fairly for their work. Passing LD 1840 would be an important step toward showing the Corrections Supervisors in the Maine DOC the respect they have earned.

Members spur Penobscot River mercury cleanup

Mercury cleanup in the Penobscot River may soon begin as Maine's longest-running federal court case comes to an end, thanks to the work of the MSEA-SEIU members of our Kate Brennan Chapter at the Maine People's Alliance (MPA).

Final hearings were held last October on a consent decree to require Mallinckrodt US LLC to pay up to \$267 million to clean up an estimated 12 tons of mercury released into the Penobscot from the former HoltraChem plant in Orrington. Mercury is a bioaccumulative neurotoxin particularly dangerous to children and people who are pregnant.

The two-decades-long effort to

hold the corporation accountable for the pollution has included public campaigns led by MPA's organizing and program staff in Bangor as well as a legal battle in partnership with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"For more than 20 years, long before I started working at MPA, my friends and colleagues have fought to clean up the river," said MSEA-SEIU Member and MPA Senior Strategist **Mike Tipping**. "This proposed consent decree is a landmark accomplishment. It means that corporations can be held accountable and that someday our kids may be able to eat the fish again."

The mercury remediation plan, which was designed by an

independent engineering firm and would be overseen by a third-party trustee, would address mercury in river sediment and nearby marshes and provide for long-term monitoring of the river.

In 2014, the state closed the lobster and crab fishery at the mouth of the Penobscot River due to high levels of mercury pollution and dangerously high levels of the toxin also have been found in the meat of black ducks in the lower river and Mendall Marsh.

The proposed settlement is supported by the Penobscot Nation and other local stakeholders. A final ruling by U.S. District Court Judge John Woodcock is pending.



MSEA-SEIU Member Mike Tipping of the Maine People's Alliance stands outside U.S. District Court in Bangor in October of 2021.

Meet MSEA-SEIU Member Justin Schlawin—

I am an Ecologist with the Maine Natural Areas Program, a division of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. I am part of a team tracking the status and trends of at-risk plant species and habitats in Maine. My work includes the inventory of Maine's public lands and rare floodplain forest habitats, mapping of Maine's biodiversity hotspots, and managing continuous long-term monitoring of Maine's Ecological Reserves. This work is critical for tracking the impact of climate change on Maine habitats, and ensuring Maine's natural heritage is maintained for future generations.



Join in climate and environmental justice action with MSEA!

Organized labor has an important role to play to help protect the land we live on, the water we drink and the air we breathe. Together, we can promote union jobs and quality working conditions for frontline workers as we transition to a cleaner, environmentally friendly economy.

Sign up here for Climate Justice Action: bit.ly/MSEAclimate
Questions? Contact MSEA-SEIU Staffer Jonathan Brown:

April 9: 2022: Climate, Jobs, and Justice Summit

Join with SEIU activists across our union for a two-hour summit to:

- Understand why this is our moment to truly tackle the multiple challenges of climate change, economic and racial justice.
- Learn why climate change is union business.
- Hear the stories of members on the front lines of climate change.
- Talk with important allies across the movement about how together, we can win.
- Prepare for Earth Day actions on April 22.

Sign up here for 2022 Climate, Jobs, and Justice Summit:
bit.ly/MSEASummit

Maine's stormwater infrastructure graded C-

By Kerem Gungor
MSEA-SEIU Member

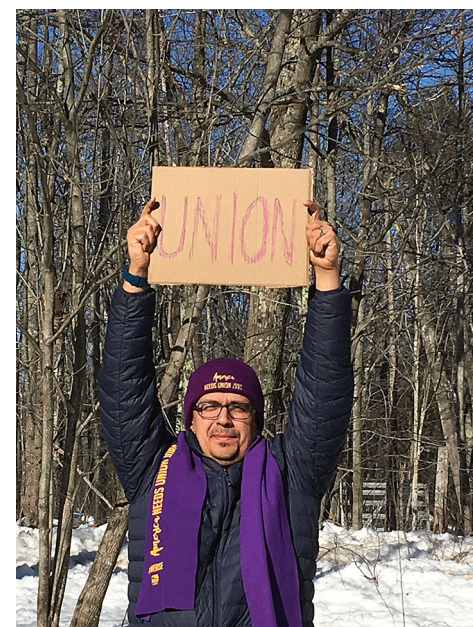
I am a stormwater engineer for the Maine Department of Transportation. I ensure the Department's projects comply with Maine's Stormwater Management Law and the Clean Water Act.

Design of systems treating stormwater pollutants and flows from highways and other transportation infrastructure is one of my primary job responsibilities. The stormwater treatment systems are instrumental for keeping our waterways safe and clean, protecting property and infrastructure against flooding.

In 2020, the American Society of Civil Engineers gave a C- grade to Maine's stormwater infrastructure in its infrastructure report card. Read it here: infrastructurereportcard.org/state-item/maine/

I had the honor of being the lead author of the first stand-alone stormwater chapter in the report card's history, which highlighted climate trends in the U.S. Northeast. Annual precipitation in the region increased approximately five inches and the sea level rose approximately one foot during the past century.

Extreme precipitation events (heaviest 1% of all daily events) increased by 70% between 1958 and 2010, which is more than any other U.S. region. It is safe to assume that these trends will continue unless decisive action is taken to achieve net zero emission on a global scale. Runoff volumes and pollutant loads



MSEA-SEIU Member Kerem Gungor shows Solidarity!

associated with the extreme events are likely to overwhelm our existing stormwater infrastructure in Maine. Impacts of the extreme events will be more severe in the highly developed urban watersheds and coastal communities.

As a stormwater practitioner, I believe the urgent need for smart and dedicated investment making the best use of green and grey infrastructure to improve the climate resiliency of our stormwater systems. When we are making critical decisions that will affect our stormwater infrastructure, we must consider its societal, environmental, and technological services and benefits.

Congratulations, MSEA-SEIU-endorsed State Rep. Jim Boyle!



MSEA-SEIU members elected former state senator Jim Boyle in a special election Jan. 11 for Maine House District 27 representing parts of Gorham and Scarborough. Rep. Boyle was sworn in Jan. 13. A forester, wetland scientist and business owner, he serves on the Legislature's Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

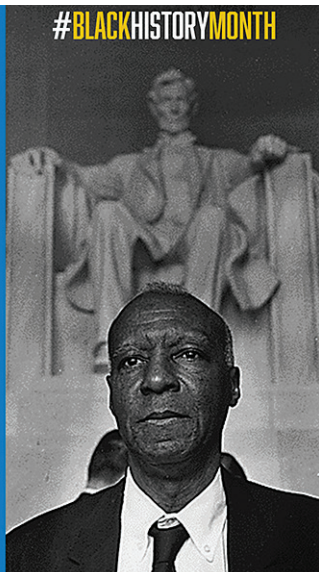
Congratulations, MSEA-SEIU-Member and South Portland Mayor Deqa Dhalac!



On Dec. 6, MSEA-SEIU Member Deqa Dhalac was elected as the mayor of South Portland. A member of our Kermit Nickerson Chapter and an immigrant from Somalia, Mayor Dhalac works as the family engagement and cultural responsiveness specialist for the Maine Department of Education. As mayor of South Portland, she's the highest ranking public official in our membership. She previously served as a South Portland city councilor for three years. PHOTO: CITY OF SOUTH PORTLAND

A. Phillip Randolph
BROTHERHOOD
OF SLEEPING
CAR PORTERS
FOUNDER
THE FIRST
BLACK LED
LABOR
UNION

#BLACKHISTORYMONTH



When A. Phillip Randolph founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first Black led labor union, it's because he knew the importance of having a voice on the job to combat racial discrimination at work and unfair labor practices. Today, we're still fighting for working people to have a say in our communities and our workplaces regardless of what we do for a living. Winning #UnionsForAll is a tough fight but it's worth it! Join the fight: seiu.co/UnionsForAll

Workers deserve representation on Community College, UMaine boards

On Jan. 12, we testified in support of LD 1820, An Act to Strengthen the Governance of the Maine Community College System and University of Maine (Emergency), sponsored by Representative Rebecca Millett.

Now more than ever, the voice of frontline workers must be heard not just by employers but also by policy makers in our Great State of Maine in order to ensure sound policies and good decision making in support of all current and future students. This is especially true for frontline workers in the Maine Community College System and the University of Maine System.

In the Maine Community College System, the adjunct faculty professors whom we proudly represent teach 75 percent of the courses in the entire Community College System. The voice of the adjunct faculty needs to be heard because, when it comes to setting policies and making decisions impacting students, the adjunct faculty know the students and their needs better than any decision makers. However, the adjunct faculty at MCCS currently lack any representation whatsoever on the MCCS board.

Passing LD 1820 would help ensure the best possible policies and decisions are made in support of the students who are counting on both the Maine Community College System and the University of Maine System to provide them with a first-rate public education.

LD 1820 provides a solution by adding three nonvoting members each to the MCCS Board of Trustees and the University of Maine System Board of Trustees. These nonvoting members would be a full-time faculty member, an adjunct faculty member and a full-time non-faculty member. Passing LD 1820 would help ensure the best possible policies and decisions are made in support of the students who are counting on both the Maine Community College System and the University of Maine System to provide them with a first-rate public education.

Intensive Case Managers call for \$5 hourly stipend, citing difficult and dangerous work

On Feb. 3, MSEA-SEIU members testified before the Legislature’s Health and Human Services Committee in support of LD 1915, An Act Improve Intensive Behavioral Health and Public Safety Case Management Services, sponsored by Representative **Seth Berry**.

This legislation would provide a stipend of \$5 per hour for workers in the Intensive Case Manager job classification and a \$1 per hour stipend for those Intensive Case Managers who are holding or obtaining a relevant master’s degree. Similar stipends are already being provided to caseworkers within the Maine DHHS Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) to aid in their recruitment and retention. LD 1915 merely would treat Intensive Case Managers the same as OCFS caseworkers in terms of stipends.

“Please consider support for LD 1915 to support Intensive Case Managers an investment in the integrity of the system,” MSEA-SEIU Member and Intensive Case Manager **James Bailey**, who works at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center, asked the Legislature’s Health and Human Services Committee. “Each patient, family, inmate and individual that an ICM connects with available resources is another individual that does not access strained critical services of emergency departments, jails and psychiatric hospitals, far more expensive and traumatic circumstances.”

Last month, members of the Health and Human Services Committee heard our testimony in support of LD 1792, which would provide a \$3 and hour,

“Please consider support for LD 1915 to support Intensive Case Managers an investment in the integrity of the system. Each patient, family, inmate and individual that an ICM connects with available resources is another individual that does not access strained critical services.”

— **James Bailey**,
MSEA-SEIU Member and an Intensive Case Manager at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center

across-the-board raise to all workers at the State’s two psychiatric hospitals, Riverview and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center, and we support amending LD 1792 to ensure workers at both of the hospitals’ Outpatient Services Teams are included. They are all doing such critical work.

LD 1915 focuses exclusively on the Intensive Case Manager job classification at Maine DHHS. LD 1915 is necessary because the ongoing public employee recruitment and retention problem in Maine State Government is particularly acute for Intensive Case Managers. Their job description notes they provide crucial services in Maine to what the Maine Bureau of Human Resources calls “a targeted group of high

risk mental health clients in a local community.”

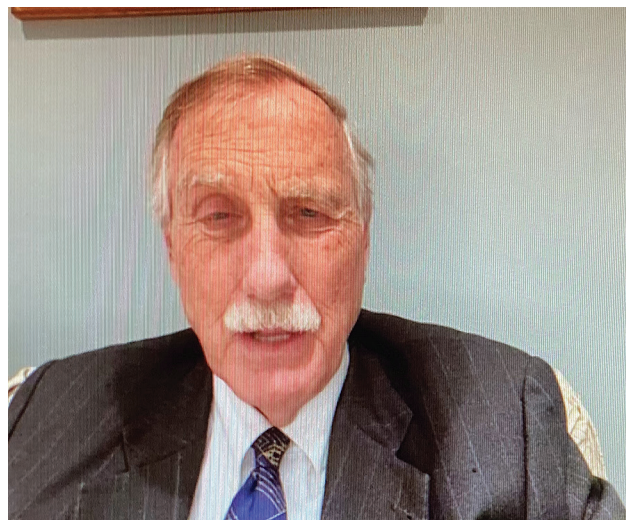
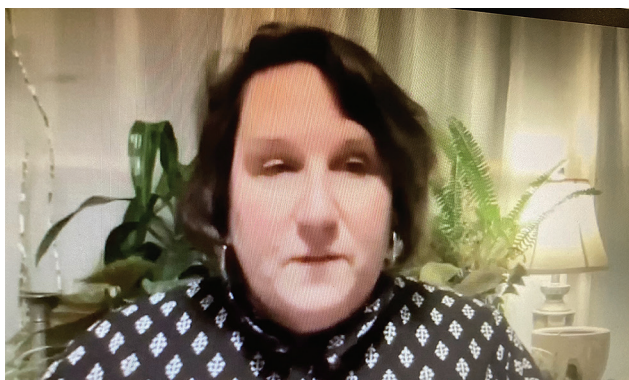
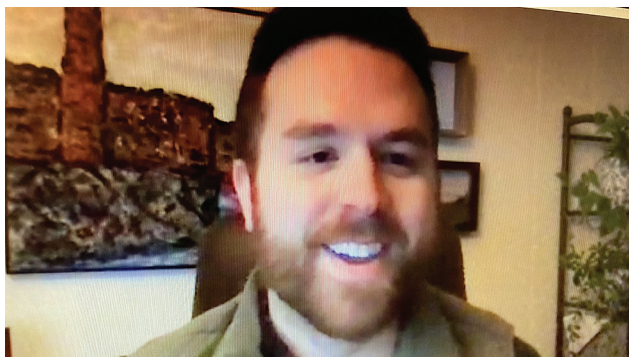
According to the bureau, the individuals with whom Intensive Case Managers work are “the most problematic/high risk mental health clients.” Intensive Case Managers are the ones who support their integration into the community.

This is clearly difficult and dangerous work, yet the State has consistently fallen short when it comes to respecting, protecting and paying Intensive Case Managers fairly for their labor. We continue to demand the State make progress on addressing the low wages that Maine State Government pays State employees. On average, State employees make 15% less than their counterparts throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional pay differences, according to the State of Maine Market Study Report dated Nov. 20, 2020.

To be sure, in contract bargaining in 2021, members of our Executive Branch bargaining team sought to address the state employee pay gap with the Mills administration. However, the administration during those negotiations refused to even acknowledge the pay gap. In fact, the administration began those negotiations without proposing any pay raise whatsoever for State employees. While our bargaining team and the administration ultimately made progress on addressing the state employee pay gap by reaching agreement on a new two-year contract, much work remains to address the pay gap.

LD 1915 would go a long way toward both addressing the pay gap and the recruitment and retention problem for Intensive Case Managers.

Senator King, House Speaker Fecteau, Representative Terry join members in virtual Town Hall for Tax Fairness



On Feb. 1, MSEA-SEIU members joined in a Virtual Town Hall for Tax Fairness with Senator **Angus King**, top, Maine House Speaker **Ryan Fecteau**, upper left, and State Representative **Mo Terry**, lower left. It was co-hosted by **Sarah Austin**, at right, of the Maine Center for Economic Policy, and MSEA-SEIU Member **Nora Flaherty-Stanford**, not shown, of the Maine People’s Alliance. Senator King discussed the need to begin taxing billionaires and putting an end to tax fraud, which he said costs America “\$600 billion to \$1 trillion per year.” Tax fairness is essential to foster a stronger economy for all Americans and to fund life-saving legislation like the Build Back Better Act pending in Congress.

Are you a public employee with student debt?

Loan cancellation may be available

In November of 2021, MSEA-SEIU Member **Becky Burns** got a surprise letter from the U.S. Department of Education relating to her student loans.

"Congratulations!" the letter started. It explained that a month earlier, the Department of Education announced a change to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program rules for a limited time that allows borrowers to get credit for payments they made on loans that wouldn't normally qualify for the PSLF.

"As a result of this limited waiver ...we have determined that you have successfully made the required 120 monthly payments in order to have all or a portion of your loans listed below forgiven," the letter to Becky stated. It went on to note that her entire balance of \$33,000 in student loans has been canceled, so she's no longer in student debt.

"Seeing over \$33,000 in debt disappear was true jubilation," she said.

Becky encourages any public servants with student debt to pursue loan forgiveness through the PSLF. "If you have federally backed student loans and have made, or will have made by October 2022, ten years of student loan payments while working for the state, make sure you get your updated certification and/or application for forgiveness submitted," she said.

The PSLF program is supposed to guarantee complete student debt forgiveness to those who dedicate a decade or more to working in public service; however, for many of us, this process has not been easy.

Under the new, temporary waiver period ending on October 31, 2022, student loan borrowers may receive additional credit for past periods of loan repayment that would otherwise not qualify for forgiveness. Nearly 50,000 borrowers are eligible for \$4.5 billion in loan forgiveness and over 500,000 student loan borrowers can receive additional credit to meet PSLF requirements. SEIU members will need to take action during the temporary waiver period to benefit.

Learn more about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Temporary Waiver: seiu.co/PSLFinfo

This change is significant. **Under this new, temporary waiver period ending on October 31, 2022, public employees can retroactively receive credit for past years of service.** As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our lives and student



MSEA-SEIU Member Becky Burns, who works as a mediator for the State of Maine Workers' Compensation Board, reports her over \$33,000 worth of student loans were forgiven last fall through the Biden administration's overhauled Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

loan repayments are scheduled to resume in May of 2022 after a two-year pause; this change to the program provides a path to relief and is a huge victory for working people in the public sector.

The temporary waiver of PSLF requirements is not automatic and is only for a limited time. **SEIU members in public service with federal student loans need to take a few crucial steps by October 31, 2022.**

Have questions about whether you qualify or how to take advantage of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness temporary waiver? See SEIU's informational sheet: seiu.co/PSLFinfo

The changes to the PSLF include:

- A limited PSLF waiver that allows all payments by student borrowers to count toward PSLF, regardless of loan program or payment plan.

Public service loan forgiveness

Take action by Oct. 31, 2022:
seiu.co/PSLFinfo

This waiver will allow student borrowers to count all payments made on loans from the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program or Perkins Loan Program. It will also waive restrictions on the type of repayment plan and the requirement that payments be made in the full amount and on-time for all borrowers. To receive these benefits, borrowers will have to submit a PSLF form by October 31, 2022, which is a single application used to certify employment and evaluate a borrower for forgiveness.

- Borrowers who currently have FFEL, Perkins, or other non-Direct Loans, will get the benefit of this limited waiver if they apply to consolidate into the Direct Loan program and submit a PSLF form by October 31, 2022. The waiver applies to loans taken out by students.
- Allowing active duty service members to count deferments and forbearances toward PSLF. This solves a problem for service members who have paused payments while on active duty but were not getting credit toward PSLF.

Automatically providing credit toward PSLF for military service members and federal employees using federal data matches. The Department will implement data matches next year to give these borrowers credit toward PSLF without an application.

- Reviewing denied PSLF applications for errors and giving borrowers the ability to have their PSLF determinations reconsidered. These actions will help identify and address servicing errors or other issues that have prevented borrowers from getting the PSLF credit they deserve.

Members! Area 1 to caucus Feb. 22; Area 3 to caucus Feb. 28

AREA 1: Members of Area 1 will hold an Area 1 Caucus via a Zoom meeting at 6 p.m. Feb. 22. Invitations were emailed out. There will be an election for three positions at the caucus – Alternate Board Director, Executive Committee (elected from the Area 1 Board of Directors in accordance with Section 1.11 of the MSEA-SEIU Local 1989 bylaws),

and the 2021 Caucus Chair. Nominations can be taken at the caucus. If you would like to nominate yourself or another member, please email your nomination to: dean.staffieri@mseaseiu.org

AREA 3: Members of Area 3 will hold an Area 3 Caucus via a Zoom meeting at 6:30 p.m. Feb.

28. Invitations were emailed out. There will be an election for Alternate Board Director and the 2021 Caucus Chair. Nominations can take place at the caucus. If you would like to nominate yourself or another member, please email your nomination to: dean.staffieri@mseaseiu.org

We'll "see" you at these virtual caucuses!

Rest in Power, Sister Jackie Roach

By **Genette Rivard**

MSEA-SEIU past president

Jackie Roach left this world on January 16, 2022, at the age of 89. Jackie loved The County, and her granddaughter even more, and it is only fitting that she spent her last few months in Easton in her care. Growing up in Mattawamkeag, she learned her work



Jackie Roach

ethic at her family's business, the Huston House. An Alumni of the University of Maine at Presque Isle, she had many humorous stories to tell. And she did.

She loved teaching and spent her career teaching in the Unorganized Schools, mostly at the Benedicta school. She would often meet people who recognized her as their teacher. She may not have recognized them as adults but she always remembered

them as her former students and would share a very specific memory with them.

As a state employee, Jackie joined her union. Never one to sit by and let life happen, she became active in her local Chapter. However, it is upon retirement that most of us got to know her.

Shortly after retiring, Jackie embarked on a months-long program known as the Heroes Program. This work took her to training programs in Baltimore and San Francisco, but it also took her to worksites on cold early mornings, chapter meetings and knocking on doors on behalf of MSEA-endorsed candidates.

Her political work did not stop there. Jackie was well known by Governors, Legislators and Lobbyists for getting right to the point as she advocated for an issue. She testified a number of times on behalf of retirees and workers' rights in general. She was unparalleled in collecting signatures for citizens' initiatives. Who could say no to her? And she spent hours in the upstairs office of 71 State St., Augusta, organizing these to be sent to cities and towns for certification.

Many candidates, especially in the greater Augusta area, have benefited from Jackie's love of the political process. For many campaign seasons, Jackie knocked on doors on behalf of endorsed candidates. She did this until her body could no longer do it and then she drove her teammate, until she could no longer.

She was a relentless PASER supporter and recruited many of us to sign up and/or increase our contribution. When she set her mind to signing up businesses for member benefits, we saw a great increase in access and availability statewide.

Jackie was just as comfortable stuffing envelopes as she was serving on the Board of Directors. No task was too menial.

If you knew Jackie, you knew that she had union in her blood. She was honest to a fault, strong willed, sincere, generous and loved to have fun. And she loved her Yankees.

Friend, union sister, role model, sounding board, travel partner, roommate. Jackie was all this and much more. I cherish the times we had together and I carry her memory and her example in my heart. So many memories! Rest in Power, dear Jackie.



Rally for Fairness, March 31, 2011, State House.



With former Governor John Baldacci.



Taking down anti-worker legislation in 2011.



With MSEA-SEIU Retiree Member and former State Rep. Paul Gilbert.

We invited folks to share a favorite memory of Jackie to be shared with her granddaughter, her only surviving family:

Cynthia Oakes: She was a tiny but mighty advocate for workers and will be sorely missed.

Genette Rivard: *Cynthia Oakes* she was a 5-foot-tall giant.

Cynthia Oakes: *Genette Rivard* 5 foot of smile is what I remember most!

Marie Wilson: She was a nice lady and will be missed by many!

Lois Baxter: She will be greatly missed. She and I used to joke about how our adventures in the early days of Summer School would forever remain between the two of us (and they will). I loved Jackie. She a wonderful person and I mourn her passing. RIP, Jackie.

Diane Goodall Sharpe: The old saying "Good things come in small packages" definitely describes Jackie! RIP, you will be missed by all who knew you.

Ramona Welton: Early in my political-learning period, I found myself with Jackie and several other members at the Legislature in Appropriations listening and monitoring. The hours passed, and trust me those chairs get uncomfortable after 6-8 hours. Jackie continue to sit and chat with us as the hours passed. People started to trickle off, leaving the committee continue to work. I thought I would stay till Jackie left. *JtRea* and I continued to stay. About 2 a.m., I'm thinking, holy this could be an all-nighter. Jackie continued to chat and share her experiences teaching and (knocking on) doors. We shared a link of The County, so I knew the geography and in many cases the people. Finally, at about 4 or possibly 5 a.m., the committee adjourned. We briefly, very briefly all compared notes and went on our way. Lesson of the night: Jackie was committed to the members of MSEA; she was competitive and could out-work and out-wait anyone. She might smile her sweet smile, but she would take you out at the knee verbally. As a role model, I could do no better. You are missed; safe passage, dear one.

Michelle Sinclair: I met this beautiful lady. She will truly be missed.

Jonathan French: Jackie was as kind as she was a fierce advocate for Maine workers and retirees. She was the example of union activism and I would enjoy seeing and chatting with her in the State House or in the Board Room or at one of many, many rallies she attended. Her energy and drive, and of course conversations about her Yankees vs. my Orioles, are the things I will remember most about her. Rest in power, Jackie.

Chris Condon: It was close to 20 years ago that I spent the summer with MSEA 1989 supporting its political program and I still have such fond memories of Jackie. She was everything good and right about a union member and an even better person.

Heidi Brooks: She was a great teacher and mentor throughout her life. We are sorry for her family's loss.

Steven R. Keaten: I can't imagine my life without her. I thought of her as my second mother. Everything anyone posts of her on here was that and so much more. We've lost a true inspiration to us all. I have so many wonderful memories of her. I know she's in the loving arms of her daughter and so happy now and that's the way it should be. Till we meet again.

Wade Colpitts: Jackie. She was a great friend and one great Lady, loved by many. I loved being on the board with her. I will miss her.