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Presenting LD 1785 “An Act To Address Staffing Shortages in Critical Public Safety Jobs through Economic Incentives”

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business

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Good morning, Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business. I am Senator Joe Baldacci and I represent Senate District 9, which is made up of Bangor and Hermon. I am here today to present LD 1785 “An Act To Address Staffing Shortages in Critical Public Safety Jobs through Economic Incentives”

Maine has been experiencing a shortage of EMT workers, even before COVID-19 entered our lives. The pandemic has exacerbated this problem and made it much more difficult to recruit and retain qualified individuals to fill these important jobs. With many workers in this field being overworked as a result of the shortage, many are leaving their jobs because of severe burnout. This bill is an attempt to intervene at the legislative level to do as the title says and address this workforce shortage.

I have talked with the Professional Firefighters of Maine as well as the Penobscot County Sheriff’s Department about this bill and they have expressed great support in favor. You should expect testimony from those two groups as well as other advocates that will echo the need for this bill. These stakeholders know firsthand how much strain has been placed on our EMT services before and during the pandemic. In the Legislature, we should be pulling all the levers we can to address this issue. This bill addresses this issue by appropriating funds to the Public Service Student Loan Forgiveness Program in the Finance Authority of Maine. These funds will be used to provide student loan forgiveness for local and county law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical services persons, dispatchers and public health workers. This incentive is one of the many levers we can pull to help this field attain and retain essential workers that our society relies on.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would happily answer any questions you may have.