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Testimony of Senator Donna Bailey supporting
**LD 1857, An Act to Create the Public Safety Health and Wellness
Reimbursement Fund to Benefit Public Safety Workers and Volunteers**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
May 12, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Esteemed Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Donna Bailey, and I proudly represent Senate District 31, which includes Buxton, Old Orchard Beach, and Saco. Today, I am pleased to offer testimony in support of LD 1857, “An Act to Create the Public Safety Health and Wellness Reimbursement Fund to Benefit Public Safety Workers and Volunteers.” The bill sponsor, Representative Lynn Copeland, has already spoken about mental health, wellness and resiliency, the lack of resources for first responders, and the shortage of professional candidates to fill these positions in our communities. In my testimony, I will speak to some other aspects of the bill.

Section 1 would establish the Public Safety Health and Wellness Reimbursement Fund based on known screenings that capture the cardiac risks for public safety workers. It would also promote confidential relationships with between public safety workers and volunteers and culturally competent mental health professionals. At the same time, it would provide opportunities and strategies for wellness and stress management in the public safety context – as well as referrals for ongoing confidential counseling should that be an individual’s desire. The Committee will hear from Dr. Lew Schlosser regarding this part of the bill.

In addition, LD 1857 would ensure that such a provision shall not take away from any benefit provided to the employee but shall instead be a supplement to any existing benefit. After all, the whole goal of this bill to improve the health, resilience, and well-being of public safety workers and volunteers. It wouldn’t achieve this goal if the workers and volunteers lost any benefits. This supplemental benefit provides confidential care, which would not be disclosed to the employer. It is intended to detect risk and help the individual develop an informed personal path to address the risk with specialized knowledge and expert assistance.

Just as important, LD 1857 would provide for a culturally competent provider, which means someone who is licensed with a specialized first responder certification designated by a state or national body – such as the American Psychological Association – or has specialized experience with the complex needs of each discipline of public safety employment. This includes the

cumulative impact of exposure to traumatic events, impacts of cumulative trauma exposure on public safety professionals' physical and mental well-being, career-specific knowledge and sensitivity, and continuing specialized knowledge of public safety psychology. One example of such a certification is the Police and Public Safety Psychology Specialization through the American Board of Professional Psychology.

To be specific, LD 1857 would establish payment for specialized cardiac bio inflammation markers to detect plaque-causing events that are precursors to cardiac disease. The testing can be blood work analysis or a more comprehensive in-person screening that includes metabolic testing and health and weight loss nutritional education. Why are we monitoring bio inflammation markers in public safety workers and volunteers? Well, the average age of a patient experiencing a heart attack nationwide is 65. However, if you look at law enforcement or public safety in general, the average age of public safety worker experiencing a heart attack is 49 – a difference of over a decade. Within this same group, 45% of law enforcement will have a heart attack under the age of 45; meanwhile, for the civilian population, just 7% of the population will have a heart attack. This results in the average life expectancy of a public safety worker being 57 years while the average life expectancy for a civilian is 79 years. Dr. Benjamin Stone will address these statistics in his testimony.

This strain and the stress of the occupation doesn't take a real life-or-death toll on law enforcement and police officers. The age-specific cancer rates among firefighters is 323% higher than that of the general population between the ages of 35 and 39. Moreover, it is attributed to more than 66% of deaths in this line of profession because they are asked to be exposed to harmful burning chemicals in the line of duty. Despite this, the baseline testing offered in workers compensation provisions are not covered by insurance. LD 1857's Public Safety Health and Wellness Reimbursement Fund would cover this gap. Today, you'll hear directly from firefighters who've experienced the consequences of this gap in coverage.

All year long, the Legislature has been searching for solutions to better support public safety workers and volunteers – the police officers and the firefighters – who respond to crises, disasters, and emergencies across the state. LD 1857 offers a solution that can help take care of those who put their lives before their own and keep all of us safe. I urge the Committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1857.

Thank you for your time, I would be happy to answer any questions.



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Buxton, Old Orchard Beach, and Saco