

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs committee, thank you for hearing testimony regarding LD2214, specifically the budget initiatives that affect the Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME).

I am Lindsey Chasteen, Office Administrator for the OCME. I have been a state employee for almost ten (10) years, and a member of the OCME for close to nine of those years.

We have three budget initiatives in the Governor's supplemental budget, as noted on page A-22. I am not going to separate out each of our initiatives, I will speak to them as a whole, as it's one agency, a team of twelve (12) people for the entire state.

On October 25<sup>th</sup>, around 8pm, I was notified it appeared we had a mass fatality event unfolding, and the OCME would need to respond. We knew we didn't have the storage space needed, a scene response was necessary, and that we had long days ahead of us. We handled it with grace and professionalism.

However, with a general fund budget of \$2.6M (including salaries and benefits), an ever-increasing workload (think homicides, drug deaths, and motor vehicle accidents) and the cost of everyday supplies continually increasing, how were we going to pay for the refrigerated trailer, the additional forensic pathologist, the overtime??

During this time, we had the Governor's Office letting us know they'd provide whatever we needed. I received a phone call, on my cellphone, at 1:15 in the morning from the United States Department of Health – Office of Emergency Management and Medical Operations advising that the President of the United States had advised his team to provide the OCME with whatever we needed.

That sounds great, but when you get down to brass tacks, it was all just lip-service. We don't have the space for more personnel, we don't have the space for another x-ray machine. What we needed was financial support.

The red tape associated with providing needed resources is not something considered in the midst of an emergency. The federal government could not provide financial assistance because Maine did not declare this event a disaster. The federal grant to provide financial reimbursement has a 27 month, yes 27 MONTH turnaround. The current OCME budget cannot absorb the financial impact of a mass fatality event.

Governor Mills has requested this funding be included in the Supplemental budget as a way to make good on her office's assurance that the OCME would have what they needed.

Our additional requests for funding allow the OCME to provide the agreed upon stipends and compensation per contract and collective bargaining agreement, and allow the OCME to operate 24/7 when necessary. The OCME has two Medical Examiner Assistants and they rotate weekends. They are the staff who conduct autopsies alongside the forensic pathologist.

Tying into these initiatives, I would ask that the Appropriations Committee take up LD610 and approve funding for that bill; allowing the OCME to take part in Maine's 1998 Special Retirement plan, just like the dispatchers, state police, crime lab, and computer crimes teams who also worked on the Lewiston mass fatality event.