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Testimony in Support of "An Act to Increase the Funding to the Live Fire Service Training Facilities Fund" LD 679

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Date: March 3, 2025

By: James A. Graves, Director, Maine Fire Service Institute

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is James A. Graves, and I have the honor of serving as the Director of the Maine Fire Service Institute (MFSI). I am here today on behalf of the Maine Fire Services Institute, not on behalf of the Maine Community College System. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of this critical legislation, "An Act to Increase the Funding to the Live Fire Service Training Facilities Fund."

Firefighters in Maine face increasingly complex and dangerous environments. From structure fires to hazardous materials incidents, technical rescues, and wildland firefighting, their ability to respond effectively depends on high quality, hands-on training in controlled live fire conditions. Unfortunately, our regional live fire training facilities —essential to firefighter safety and proficiency— are aging, deteriorating, and, in some cases, are no longer meeting the rigorous training demands of today's fire service.

This bill seeks a **one-time allocation of \$1,000,000 for fiscal year 2026-27** to support the construction, repair, and replacement of these essential training facilities across Maine. These funds, awarded through the Maine Fire Protection Services Commission, and administered through the Southern Maine Community College/Maine Fire Service Institute will ensure that firefighters across the state have access to safe, modern, and properly maintained live fire training environments.

The Urgent Need for Investment

1. Ensuring Firefighter Safety and Readiness:

- Live fire training facilities allow firefighters to gain critical experience in real-world conditions, sharpening their skills before they face life-threatening emergencies in the field.
- Without functioning training sites, many departments—especially in rural areas—struggle to provide their firefighters with the live fire experience necessary to meet the National Fire Protection Association fire training standards that MFSI has adopted to train and certify firefighters in Maine.

2. Addressing Facility Deterioration:

- Many existing live fire-training facilities across Maine are outdated, with structural issues that limit their usability.
- Some departments must travel long distances to access suitable training sites, increasing costs and reducing opportunities for regular live burn exercises.



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3. Supporting Recruitment and Retention:

- Quality training facilities help attract and retain firefighters by providing them with the hands-on experience necessary to build confidence and competency.
- Investing in live fire training demonstrates the state's commitment to supporting its fire service professionals.

4. Enhancing Public Safety:

- Well-trained firefighters are better equipped to protect their communities, reducing property loss and improving life-saving outcomes.
- By ensuring training sites are accessible and up to standard, Maine can continue to meet evolving fire service challenges effectively.

A Worthwhile Investment for Maine

The funding proposed in this bill is not just an expenditure—it is an investment in the safety of our firefighters and the communities they serve. Firefighters put their lives on the line daily, and they deserve the best possible training resources to do their jobs safely and effectively.

I urge this committee to support this bill and provide the funding needed to modernize and maintain Maine's regional live fire training facilities. By doing so, we reinforce our commitment to firefighter safety, strengthen the fire service statewide, and enhance the protection of Maine's residents and businesses. Under the current law *Title 20A §9004. Live Fire Service Training Facilities Fund* we have replaced the Yarmouth Fire Training Facility and constructed two new facilities in Farmington and Fairfield. We also had some repairs done to the Auburn facility. Sadly, the need statewide is significant for these facilities. The goal of the Maine Fire Protection Services Commission has been to establish 11 regional fire-training facilities to ensure training is available within a one-hour drive of most fire departments.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

James A. Graves
Director, Maine Fire Service Institute