



**Testimony of  
Michael R. Scott, President  
Professional Fire Fighters of Maine**

**LD 993 An Act to Require First Responder Training for Mental Health Crisis and Critical Incident Stress Recognition**

Good morning, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

My name is Michael Scott, and I am the President of the Professional Fire Fighters of Maine. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding LD 993, An Act to Require First Responder Training for Mental Health Crisis and Critical Incident Stress Recognition. I represent over 1,200 members, including career firefighters, paramedics, EMTs, and dispatchers. For more than 75 years, the Professional Fire Fighters of Maine (PFFMaine) have been committed to enhancing the health and safety of firefighters.

I stand before you today to voice our unwavering support for LD 993, an act that seeks to establish and recognize essential training for our first responders in mental health crisis management, critical incident stress recognition, and peer team support initiatives. As we navigate an era marked by increasing demands on our emergency services—characterized by significant emotional and psychological strain—it is imperative that we equip our first responders with the knowledge and skills necessary to recognize and respond effectively to mental health crises.

First responders, including firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical personnel, are often on the front lines of crises that extend beyond physical emergencies. The nature of our work exposes us to traumatic events, high-stress scenarios, and the difficult realities of human suffering. Studies indicate that first responders experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to the general population. Acknowledging this reality is the first step toward safeguarding the mental well-being of our heroic personnel.

Despite these challenges, and although the situation is improving, there remains a stigma surrounding mental health discussions within the first responder community. This stigma can deter individuals from seeking help and may exacerbate the psychological toll that the job takes. LD 993 is a vital initiative aimed at breaking this cycle and fostering a supportive environment where mental health is prioritized alongside physical health.

The demand for mental health crisis training cannot be overstated. Emergency responders must be equipped not only to address physical injuries but also to understand, recognize, and respond to the mental health needs of the individuals they serve. The proposed legislation will provide standardized training consistent with industry best practices, ensuring that all first responders across Maine receive a baseline of knowledge and skills that align with recognized behavioral health programs.

One of the benchmarks for such training can be found in the programs developed by the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) and its Center of Excellence. The IAFF's and PFFMaine's Behavioral Health Programs have emerged as a gold standard within the industry, offering structured, evidence-based training that addresses the nuances of mental health crises faced by first responders.

LD 993 seeks to implement a similar approach in Maine, emphasizing not just theoretical understanding but also practical applications. This training will cover critical incident stress recognition, coping mechanisms, and de-escalation techniques, providing our first responders with a toolkit to navigate mental health scenarios proficiently.

By advocating for LD 993, we encourage a cultural shift within our community—a shift that normalizes conversations around mental health, promotes proactive engagement, and fosters resilience among our personnel. Education and training will empower first responders to address the immediate needs of crisis situations while also recognizing their limits and the importance of seeking help when needed.

Enacting LD 993 will create an environment where mental health is treated with the same urgency and care as physical health. This aligns perfectly with our values as firefighters: to protect and serve not only the communities we respond to but also each other. By strengthening our approach to mental health, we can embody the supportive family that first responder communities often declare themselves to be.

Establishing consistent training standards and standards of care across all first responder agencies in Maine is crucial. Such uniformity ensures that every responding member, regardless of their location or department, operates from the same playbook. This consistency leads to improved outcomes for both responders and the communities they serve.

When first responders have a shared understanding of mental health crisis protocols, it ensures better collaboration during joint responses to critical incidents. This teamwork is not only beneficial on the front lines but also builds stronger inter-departmental relationships and fosters a community that looks out for one another.

While we recognize the undeniable benefits of LD 993, we must also acknowledge the challenges that lie ahead. Implementing comprehensive training requires funding, resources, and a commitment from leadership at all levels. This is where the Professional Fire Fighters of Maine can make a significant impact. By rallying our collective support behind this initiative, we can help secure the necessary resources to prioritize mental health training and access to behavioral health resources in our state.

Support for LD 993 must be championed at the grassroots level—starting with our elected officials, all municipalities, and all fire/police departments, as well as other public safety entities within our firehouses, through community outreach and in public forums. Now more than ever, our voices must unite to advocate for the mental health of our first responders and the communities we serve.

Maine's LD 993 represents an essential step toward safeguarding our first responders' mental health and well-being while fostering a more resilient and effective emergency response framework. As the Professional Fire Fighters of Maine, our support for this legislation can change lives—both for those on the front lines and the communities they serve.

In closing, we are asking all of you, along with other members of the House and Senate and our Governor, to join us in supporting the passage and implementation of LD 993. Together, we can cultivate a culture that emphasizes the importance of mental health training, providing our first responders with the tools they need to recognize and respond to mental health crises effectively. By committing to this cause, we not only honor our calling but also ensure that we are prepared to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow with compassion, understanding, and readiness.

Thank you for considering this crucial initiative and for your steadfast commitment to the well-being of all Maine's first responders. Your support for LD 993 is not just a vote for legislation; it is a vote for the mental health and future of our community.

Sincerely,

*Michael*

Michael Scott, President  
Professional Fire Fighters of Maine

April 2, 2025

Michael J Crouse for PFFMaine  
Kittery  
LD 993  
See attached