



LD 507 An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Fund LifeFlight of Maine

Testimony in Support

April 15, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am submitting testimony on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations in support of this bill. Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, 8 nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with more than 10,000 employees statewide.

In 1998, Maine was the only state in the country without access to dedicated medical helicopters. There was no infrastructure to support air medical operations and only two of Maine's 36 hospitals had helipads. There were no helipads at the major trauma centers, no statewide communication system to support air medical operations, no maintenance facilities, limited weather reporting, and limited fuel availability outside of major airports. To address this challenge, Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center partnered with Central Maine Medical Center providing leadership and resources as the founding organizations for LifeFlight of Maine.

To assure safe and high-quality operations LifeFlight had to build a system from scratch using lessons learned from across the world and partnerships with other high-performance providers. In the ensuing years, with private and public support, including three publicly supported bond issues, LifeFlight has built a comprehensive system to support the safe delivery of aviation medicine, incorporating an envelope of weather reporting, low-level instrument flight operations, fuel, communications, and state-of-the-art aircraft to assure the safety of the LifeFlight teams and patients.

The bond bill before you today provides critically important funding to resource essential LifeFlight infrastructure including

Assisting hospitals in rebuilding helipads and heliports - Total: \$4,150,000

Hospital helipads are the "doors" to critical emergency access a patients need transfer from community to tertiary hospitals in Maine and beyond.

Assisting hospitals and airports to establish fuel depots - Total: \$2,160,000

On site fuel availability decreases post flight turnaround times to improve access and support long-distance operations.

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Eastern Maine Medical Center
Home Care & Hospice
Inland Hospital
Maine Coast Hospital
Mayo Hospital
Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Northern Light Pharmacy
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

Upgrading LifeFlight's communication system for coordinating multiple agency response - Total: \$875,000

A communications system allowing VOIP and satellite tracking and voice communication to provide flight coordination including other agencies responding to Maine for mutual aid.

Replacing 10 of 17 automate weather observing systems at hospitals, airports, and islands - Total: \$1,300,000

Filling in the weather gaps between major airports with FAA supported AWOS systems coupled with new weather camera technology to provide real-time views of weather conditions for flight planning.

Purchase an airplane to expand LifeFlight's transport program to assure 24/365 capacity - Total: \$5,000,000

LifeFlight has one airplane which was manufactured in 1998. They have just made substantial investments in new navigation technology but when it is in required or unscheduled maintenance the aircraft is not available to patients, approximately 40% of the time. A second aircraft will assure patients needing long distance emergency transport in Maine or beyond LifeFlight is there to meet their need

Every hospital, doctor and patient has a powerful example of LifeFlight saving lives in Maine. I offer the following feedback from Northern Light AR Gould Hospital in Presque Isle.

"With our great distances in rural Maine (AR Gould is 150 miles from EMMC) air transport with its inherent speed is often the only practical means of transfer for critically ill or injured patients. Rural hospitals in the county and throughout the State of Maine are continuously challenged with staffing experienced providers and staff capable of managing complex, critically ill or injured patients, many smaller hospitals are staffed in off hours by one physician or advanced practice professional provider. LifeFlight clinicians provide an advanced skill set to care for emergency patients that has saved thousands of lives in rural hospitals. Unfortunately, interfacility ground based ambulance transport availability has been hollowed out throughout Maine due to difficulty in staffing and chronic underfunding. LifeFlight is the only emergency transportation service provider with the capacity to reach every patient in need of highly acute emergency care. As hospitals face continued financial pressure resulting in closure of patient care units, there will be further erosion locally of experienced staff to deal with common emergencies, like obstetrical emergencies at a facility that no longer has a delivery ward, escalating the need for LifeFlight clinicians in emergency departments throughout the State of Maine."

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment in support of this important legislation.