



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

**Maine's Paid Family Medical Leave Act
LD(s) 406, 539, 952, 575, 1169, 1221, 1249, 1273, 1307, 1333, 1400 & 1712**

Good morning, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished members of the Labor Committee.

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 the various LDs that are before you today regarding the Paid Family Medical Program as codified in Title 26, Chapter 7, Subchapter 6-C, §850-B.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed Legislative Documents (LDs) regarding Maine's Paid Family and Medical Leave Program (PFML). As a representative of the Professional Fire Fighters of Maine, I appreciate the committee's efforts to review and consider necessary revisions to this important program. While we acknowledge the significant intent behind this program to support workers, their families, and their medical needs, I would like to address a crucial aspect of this discussion rather than take a stance for or against the pending LDs: the importance of considering an exemption for Maine's public sector first responders who are covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) with their respective employers. These agreements have the potential to more effectively meet the intent and spirit of the statute while meeting the needs of the municipality, the union, and the employees they represent, as well as the taxpayers we protect and serve.

The public sector first responders play a vital role in ensuring the safety and well-being of Maine residents. Our work sometimes places us in prolonged and unpredictable situations, requiring a high level of dedication, resilience, and commitment. These challenges underscore the necessity of a comprehensive and supportive framework for Paid Family and Medical Leave that safeguards not just our well-being, but also the ability to respond effectively to emergencies.

Collective bargaining has long been a cornerstone of labor relations in our public sector, affording employees the opportunity to negotiate terms that address their unique needs and circumstances. While the existing PFML framework serves an important purpose, it is critical to recognize that public sector first responders often operate under specific conditions that might not be adequately covered by a one-size-fits-all approach.

Given this context, we propose that the committee consider including provisions that would *exempt* public sector first responders who are covered by collective bargaining agreements from certain aspects of the proposed revisions to the PFML program. This exemption would allow us the freedom to negotiate our terms and conditions with our employers by crafting a Paid Family and Medical Leave plan that is tailored to the specific needs of our workforce and the community we work in.

There are several compelling reasons for this approach:

1. **Tailored Solutions:** By allowing collective bargaining agreements to dictate the terms of Paid Family and Medical Leave for public sector first responders, both unions and employers can negotiate terms that reflect the unique circumstances of our work. This flexibility allows us to tailor provisions that most effectively meet our needs, including the possibility of enhanced benefits, conditions for leave, and specific provisions addressing the unique emotional and physical demands of our professions.
2. **Shared Responsibility:** The nature of collective bargaining encourages dialogue and partnership between employers, unions, and employees. A collaborative approach not only serves the interests of first responders but also ensures that the needs of the taxpayer are met. Negotiating a PFML plan through collective bargaining can result in a solution that balances employee benefits with fiscal responsibility, ultimately providing a better outcome for all involved—employees, employers, and the public.
3. **Sustaining Community Services:** Public sector first responders provide critical services to communities and are often faced with unique challenges that come with the territory. Allowing us the latitude to create a PFML plan through collective bargaining means that we can effectively manage workforce challenges while ensuring that our communities continue to receive the high-quality emergency services they rely on. The stability and continuity of these essential services must be a top priority, and allowing for flexibility in how we manage benefits can ensure that we continue to serve our communities effectively.
4. **Maine's Tradition of Cooperation:** Maine has a rich history of cooperative labor relations that fosters respect and mutual benefit. By allowing public sector first responders the opportunity to negotiate a PFML plan through collective bargaining, we not only align with this tradition but also reinforce the commitment to collaborative labor relations that strengthen our communities.

5. **Addressing Concerns of Public Funding:** Given that taxpayer dollars ultimately fund public sector operations, it is critical that we approach benefits such as Paid Family and Medical Leave with consideration of fiscal impact. Collective bargaining agreements enable direct negotiation on this front, allowing both the employer and union to weigh financial implications and craft a plan that provides necessary benefits without imposing undue burdens on local budgets.

In closing, we respectfully urge you to consider the unique circumstances faced by public sector first responders. We propose that the Labor Committee exempt our profession from specific provisions of the proposed revisions to the PFML program, allowing for collective bargaining agreements that can develop a plan equal to or better than what is currently in place.

This approach not only allows us to tailor benefits to meet our community and employees' needs but also preserves the values of cooperation that characterize Maine's labor relations.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of our proposal and look forward to the possibility of further discussing these important distinctions as the committee deliberates. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Michael

Michael Scott, President
Professional Fire Fighters of Maine

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