

Testimony of Danielle Bell Flannery

To the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology

In support of LD 1892 – An Act to Make Changes to the So-called Dig Safe Law

January 21, 2020

To Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, I would like to thank you for being here, and allowing me to speak. My name is Danielle Bell Flannery, and I am one of Captain Michael Bell's three daughters. As you know, he was killed in the Farmington propane explosion on Sept 16th of last year. I stand here before you without a dad. Without my Superman. I am here in support of LD 1892, An Act to Make Changes to the So-called Dig Safe Law.

The leak that led to the explosion that killed my father was preventable and never should have happened. It was caused when a bollard was augured into place, slicing open the underground propane line at the LEAP facility. This leak caused hundreds of gallons of propane to seep into the ground, eventually finding its way into the basement of the building. According to the fire marshal's office, where the propane line was located had been a point of contention when the bollards were placed. If propane lines were reportable to Dig Safe, they could have called and obtained this information.

The truth is, this tragedy could have been much worse. There were so many miracles that day –The children at the school bus stop nearby had just been picked up. Although the blast extensively damaged several homes, none of the residents were wounded or killed. Larry Lord, the maintenance man who evacuated the building, escaped with his life, although he was critically injured in the blast and has spent more than 4 months in the hospital. We continue to hope for positive news about his recovery every day. None of the other LEAP employees, still standing on site by an out building, were injured when the explosion decimated the building. The other firefighters, while injured, have been able to come back home. The physical injuries and emotional toll of that morning will mean that life for these men and their families will never be the same.

While there could have been so many other tragedies that day, the loss of my dad was enough. Losing him to such a preventable death is enough. Not having my mentor, my friend, a role model for his grandkids and a husband for my mother, is tragedy enough, and my family can't just sit by and "take one for the team".

One of the best things about my dad was – he showed up. He was there when you needed him, he cared, he understood, and he showed up. My dad was a hero, not because of how he died, but because of how he lived. You could always count on him, whether you were family, friend, or fellow fire fighter. You experienced his presence and were better for it in the end. All of YOU can show up for US now.

Supporting LD 1892, An Act to Make Changes to the So-called Dig Safe Law, tells us that you care, that his life counted, and that you aren't willing to stand for a senseless, preventable death, all in the name of saving propane companies some time and money. So many people have offered their help or asked us what they can do. This is something you can do for my family, the families of all those impacted, and for the next family that will inevitably go through this if this bill does not pass.

This type of legislation has been proposed before. Had it passed then, I wouldn't need to be standing before you today. My father wouldn't be missing graduations, weddings and great grandchildren. Those things were taken from him; from us and I urge you, don't let them be taken from anyone else.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you today. Please pass LD 1892, An Act to Make Changes to the So-called Dig Safe Law and send a message to the propane companies and the citizens of Maine that this tragedy was enough. That my father's death was enough. Enough to bring about positive change that will protect countless others going forward against the danger of allowing the propane industry to be exempt from Dig Safe. Show up for us today and make it clear that he mattered enough, because he did to us.