

March 2, 2023

Senator Michael Tipping, Chair

Representative Amy Roeder, Chair

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, Cross Building, Room 202

Re: LD 426 an Act to Amend the Eligibility Criteria for Creditable Service in the Armed Forces of the United States under the Maine Public Employees Retirement System

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Arthur Ledoux. I am the Veteran Service Officer for the City of Westbrook, and I am here today for the third time in support of LD 426. Hopefully it's a charm. As some of you may know, last year this Bill made it all the way to Appropriations where it sat unfunded and is now shredded.

I was going to submit 20 copies of a blank sheet of paper and speak to you from the heart, however the process requires me to submit written testimony.

I am not going to review my 10 years in the Marine Corps, or my work as the first and only municipal Veteran

Service Officer in the State of Maine in addition to my duties as an Operations Manager. It's all on the record.

It is clear to me when I look at the statute, as currently written that the United States and the State of Maine, recognizes and honors active-duty service in times of war and conflict, but not this one. Why?

Maine men and women who volunteered and served during these conflicts under LD 426 checked all the boxes.

- Volunteered to serve - check
- Answered the call - check
- Sent to foreign soil – check
- Engaged the enemy – check
- Body bags – check
- Purple Hearts - check
- Loss of equipment – check
- Bravery and heroism- check
- Accomplished the mission - check
- Served honorably – check

We [veterans] didn't volunteer for the money, and it's an injustice to hold a fiscal note over our heads. We learn about honor, integrity, in boot camp and are constantly

told how lawmakers “have our backs.” This is your chance.

It troubles me that in 2023 some 40 years after these conflicts that our service is somehow “less than, not enough, too expensive.” If not, then what’s the rationale.

If we are not going to treat all veterans the same, then let’s at least have consistency to treat all veterans who served during wars and conflicts the same.

Honestly, after the Bill died last year in the Appropriations in basket, I gave up on you and this process, especially when I learned that this was not a funding priority from this Committee. You let us down. However, Rep. Salisbury reached out to me and said we can’t give up. None of the veterans who served during Beirut and Grenada gave up and neither can we. So here I am. I’ve done my part, I’ve given, and now it’s your turn to “have our backs.”

Ladies and gentlemen, this is it for me. If everything goes as planned, I may be retiring next year. After going to work at age 16, enlisting in the Marines at age 17 and serving 10 years, and working for 35 years after that, it’s time for my wife and I to take our packs off and hang up our boots.

So, once again and for the final time, on behalf of all veterans who served during Beruit and Grenada I ask for your support of LD 426 by adding and funding these 2 military conflicts, (16 months) to the statute and recognize the service of veterans who served bravely and honorably during that period, some of whom made the ultimate sacrifice. **You** can fix this as it is long overdue.

Please make this a priority.

I thank you for your time.

Respectfully, Arthur Ledoux