

Testimony in Support of LD 439

An Act to Allow Death by Suicide to be Considered a Death While in the Line of Duty

Good morning, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Rick Petrie, and I am a Paramedic who has worked in the Maine EMS system for 42 years. I am now the Chief Operations Officer for North East Mobile Health, a for-profit Ambulance Service based in Scarborough Maine and the Program Director for the Jackman Paramedic project.

On Monday, April 24, 1995, Paramedic Robert O'Donnell killed himself at his parents' ranch. Robert O'Donnell was the Paramedic that crawled through a shaft to extricate baby Jessica from a well in Texas eight years earlier after working for 58 hours to free her. He got divorced three years earlier. After the suicide, his brother Ricky was quoted as saying "Ever since that Jessica deal, his life fell apart. There's a deal that happens when people are in these real stressful situations, it's so hard for them to deal with this afterward." Jessica survived the incident; Robert never recovered.

Several years ago I was here with a friend, and Auburn Police Officer, and we were both testifying about PTSD and its' effect on public safety personnel. We were there because we both lived through a particularly heinous event in Auburn on October 27, 1984. During that testimony, he recounted the nights sitting on the edge of his bed with his service revolver in his mouth because he could not get the sounds, and the sights, and the smell out of his mind.

We need to be better at taking care of our public safety providers; helping them get the mental health support that they need to deal with this exceedingly difficult, stressful job.

But, when we fail, we need to recognize that their death is as much in the line of duty as getting killed in an accident, or shot, or stabbed while on duty.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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