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Testimony of Representative Suzanne Salisbury supporting
LD 526, "An Act to Provide Funding to Emergency Medical Services Organizations"
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Good afternoon Senator Beebe-Center, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is Sue Salisbury, and I represent House District 128, which includes part of Westbrook. I am here today to speak in strong support of **LD 526, "An Act to Provide Funding to Emergency Medical Services Organizations."**

It is not uncommon for citizens to not know a lot about the operations of the emergency services in their communities, only that when it is needed it is available. It wasn't until the 130th Legislature with the passage of LD 1988 that Emergency Medical Service (EMS) was considered an *essential* service. Currently in Maine there are 173 fire departments, 41 nonprofit, community-based EMS services, 35 independent municipal EMS services, 11 private EMS services, 11 hospital-based EMS services, college-based EMS services, two tribal EMS services and one air medical service¹. These services are funded by taxes, Medicare and Medicaid and insurance reimbursements.

Last year, over the course of six meetings, the Blue-Ribbon Commission on EMS gathered to examine a question most of us already knew the answer to: what is the status of EMS in Maine? In short, the entire sector is in crisis. EMS across the state are unable to provide the level of service they have in the past and there are times when there is simply not an ambulance available to transport the patient. In some cases, this merely results in a scheduling issue where a patient might not be able to go from one facility to another. In extreme situations, victims at the scene of a car accident are having to wait until an ambulance from another community can respond, and with each passing minute, the likelihood of survival is less and less assured.

EMS in Maine is at a tipping point. Services have closed because they cannot afford to keep the doors open. Municipalities are facing increased costs to pay for services that they once received for free. Providers are working 80+ hours a week and fewer and fewer people are considering careers in EMS due to low wages. We are in a downward spiral and our communities are calling out for help.

¹ <https://legislature.maine.gov/emergency-medical-services-study>

So, what is the answer? The Blue-Ribbon Commission determined that “there is a need for \$70 million in funding a year for the next 5 years to support transporting EMS services in the State.” This is a huge ask, so commission members, including the sponsor of this bill, Speaker Talbot-Ross decided to focus on the immediate needs. How can we as a state provide emergency funding, a lifeline really, to services with the most need? This bill asks for \$25 million to help services stay open, attract new providers and start the process of redefining what EMS in Maine looks like.

I appreciate your time and I urge you to support this bill as amended.