

Testimony in Support of LD 526
An Act to Provide Funding to Emergency Medical Services Organizations

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.

I was also fortunate to serve as a member of the EMS Blue Ribbon Committee whose work laid the foundation for this, and other, legislation supporting Emergency Medical Services in Maine.

As the Blue Ribbon Committee heard very clearly, EMS is in trouble. We are inadequately funded, tightly regulated, and under resourced. We have a significant staffing shortage because of poor wages and benefits, long hours and incredibly difficult working conditions. Yet, every day, EMS providers have found a way to respond, sacrificing time with their families, appropriate rest, and their own mental health. In the past, much of the State relied on volunteers, but those days are coming to an end.

Unfortunately, our ability to respond is now starting to crumble in many areas of the state. We can cite many instances where the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th level mutual aid ambulances are required to respond to emergency calls, resulting in significant delays. There are even cases where family members have placed patients in their vehicles because there was no ambulance available to respond in a timely fashion. Public Safety Dispatchers regularly speak of desperation while trying to find an ambulance to respond. Patients are being held in emergency departments for hours, and even days, waiting to find an available ambulance to transport their patients.

Nationally, the average median wage for EMT's is \$17.05 per hour, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics lists EMS as one of the lowest-paying jobs in health care. The main reason behind the poor wages is inadequate reimbursement from the federal government. Most EMS calls in Maine (70-75%) are reimbursed by Medicare or Maine Care at 85% of what it costs to respond on a call and transport a patient. There is no reimbursement for readiness or calls where the patient is evaluated and treated but not transported.

Brand-new, green EMS providers are being placed on the ambulances with little or no preparation, mentoring or oversight, and many are fleeing the field after working for a short time, overwhelmed by the enormity of their responsibilities.

This bill would provide a short-term boost to help every ambulance in the State of Maine, all of whom are struggling on some level. It will have to be followed by additional money through increased reimbursements to help stabilize and sustain the services once they get back on their feet. It will also require the EMS services to be accountable,

with mandated reporting on how the money was spent and required participation in a review process for any service doing less than 2000 calls per year.

We are in crisis, and are asking you to approve expending approximately \$18 for every resident of the State of Maine, \$25 million dollars, to help avoid a crisis and enable the EMS providers to continue to serve our citizens, utilizing a formula that assigns a high priority to rural services. Our EMS services need this money now to keep their heads above water and start recruiting new members, without unnecessary red tape and application processes that will only serve to delay the receipt of the money and potentially inflict further damage that will directly impact our citizens who are most vulnerable.

But please do not just take my word on this issue. If you haven't heard from them already, reach out to your local EMS service and talk with the providers and administrators. They can better explain how they are struggling to care for the members of your local community.

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

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