



Mark W. Lawrence
Senator, District 35

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished members of the Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Senator Mark Lawrence, and I represent District 35, which includes the towns of Eliot, Kittery, Ogunquit, South Berwick, York, and part of Berwick. I am excited to sponsor and present LD 1123 An Act to Create a Presumption that a Cardiovascular Injury or Pulmonary Disease Suffered by Certain Law Enforcement Officers in the Course of Employment.

As the York County District Attorney, I worked closely with the law enforcement officers in my area. I partnered with them on some devastating cases, but my role in the case came much after the initiating 911 call. I did not have to arrive on a dangerous scene not knowing if I was going to return home to my own loved ones. Or in the moments and days after the call, to deal with the reverberating effects of an emergency, like being the one who had to tell someone that their loved ones died.

These officers do not complain about their jobs. They show up every day to make sure that 911 calls are answered and the community is safe. But, these jobs and the stress from these jobs have lasting impact on officer's bodies.

You will hear more about the data in the testimony that follows, but the data clearly demonstrates that law enforcement officers have a higher risk of developing cardiovascular injury or pulmonary disease.

For example, SIGMA Tactical Wellnessⁱ, an organization that works to improve the well-being of all tactical and emergency-response personnel, noted the following startling statistics:

- The average age of a patient with a heart attack for a civilian is 65 years old but it is 49 years old for a law enforcement officer.
- And that only 7% of civilians have heart attacks under the age of 45, but that that number rises to 45% for law enforcement officers.

According to the science, the reason for this heightened risk is two-fold.

First, law enforcement officers do not have the luxury of set sleep schedules. Studies show that “chronic disruptions of the circadian clock, as with night-shift work, contribute to increased cardiovascular risk.”ⁱⁱ

Second, law enforcement officers have to cope with stress every single day. According to the Harvard School of Public Health,ⁱⁱⁱ “Acute episodic and chronic stress repeatedly trigger the fight-or-flight response causing a persistent elevation of hormones, leading to a risk of health problems” including an increased risk of heart disease.



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If passed, LD 1123 would recognize, like the Legislature has already recognized for firefighters^{iv} and state employees who work in prison and state correctional facilities^v, that if a law enforcement officer has a cardiovascular injury or pulmonary disease then there is a rebuttable presumption that it is covered by worker's compensation.

I urge you all to include law enforcement officers in this presumption, because I know that it will give peace of mind to those officers who risk their lives every day and to their families. For example, later in today's testimony, you will hear from Deputy Chief Small of the Sanford Police Department who will share his personal story about having suffered a heart attack last year and realizing that it was not covered by worker's compensation. I can't imagine what that was like for him and his family, but I do know that we should pass this so future officers can avoid having a similar experience.

For these reasons, I urge you to support LD 1123 and vote ought to pass. I am happy to answer any questions.

ⁱ About | Sigma Tactical Health and Wellness (iamsigma.com).

ⁱⁱ Role of the circadian system in cardiovascular disease - PubMed (nih.gov)

ⁱⁱⁱ Stress and Health | The Nutrition Source | Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

^{iv} Title 39-A, §328: Cardiovascular injury or disease and pulmonary disease suffered by a firefighter or resulting in a firefighter's death (maine.gov)

^v Title 39-A, §328-C: Heart disease or hypertension suffered by certain employees (maine.gov).