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April 24, 2023

Testimony of Rep. Stephen Moriarty presenting

LD 601, An Act to Reduce the Shortage of Municipal Emergency Medical Services Personnel by Removing Certain Vaccination Requirements

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Steve Moriarty and I represent House District 110, which includes the communities of Cumberland, Chebeague Island and Long Island. I appear before you today to present LD 601, **An Act to Reduce the Shortage of Municipal Emergency Medical Services Personnel by Removing Certain Vaccination Requirements.**

The following comments lay the groundwork for LD 601. The 130th Legislature recognized the statewide staffing crisis in EMS personnel and, in response, appointed the Blue Ribbon Commission to Study Emergency Medical Services in the State. The Commission met six times in the late summer and autumn of 2022 and issued its report in December. I fully acknowledge that the Commission did not address the issue of vaccination requirements and EMS staffing shortages. However, the extracts below from the report are pertinent and helpful in understanding the scope of the problem.

EMS services in Maine are at the edge of a cliff, or over it, and changes must occur to ensure that when someone calls with a medical emergency, EMS services are available and ready to assist (p. 18).

Community paramedicine is an important part of the EMS system in the State and has proven to be impactful in reducing healthcare costs (p. 15).

Volunteerism, however, is declining, and struggles with EMS employee recruitment and retention have exacerbated problems for a workforce that is already stretched too thin (p. 9).

LD 601 focuses narrowly on EMS responders who are employed by towns and cities or who volunteer for their municipalities by providing direct patient care.

The Bureau of Emergency Medical Services, better known as Maine EMS, is a bureau within the Department of Public Safety. The Department has statutory rule-making authority to oversee the delivery of EMS. Last summer, the Department adopted a rule, later approved by the Attorney General, requiring EMS personnel to be

District 110: Cumberland, Chebeague Island, Long Island

vaccinated against COVID and, effective November 1, 2023, against influenza. An unvaccinated responder may provide direct patient care for a maximum of 15 minutes - a time limit that effectively prevents a responder from providing any care at all.

As a result of this rule, my hometown of Cumberland lost the services of a highly-trained paramedic who had decided against the COVID vaccine. The town will likely lose additional personnel when the influenza requirement takes effect in November.

LD 601 simply provides that licensed EMS responders employed by municipalities, or volunteering for municipalities, may continue to provide treatment without having been vaccinated against either disease. This will greatly assist my hometown and likely others in maintaining necessary staffing levels.

In closing, I will point out what has happened since the rule was adopted. In December 2022, the U.S. Defense Department withdrew its previous COVID vaccination requirement. Within the past couple of months, the University of Maine System and the Community College System have done the same. Maine should take the same step on the limited scale proposed by LD 601 and assist our municipalities in achieving the appropriate level of staffing necessary to protect their residents.

I would be pleased to answer any questions.