

Testimony in Opposition to LD 258, Public Safety Section

An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs 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. The Blue-Ribbon Committee reviewed a financial analysis from Joseph Kellner that looked at the budgets and costs for ambulance services around Maine and determined that ambulance services doing less than 1800 calls per year (the overwhelming majority of services in Maine) lost \$2000 per call, and ambulance services in our urban areas lost \$400 per call. ***Every ambulance service in Maine, regardless of their organizational structure, loses money when they provide 911 service.***

We know that the EMS system in Maine is broken and needs a review to develop a more efficient and sustainable model. However, it took us 40 years of piecing together an emergency response system, and we cannot fix it overnight. The overhaul will take time, and the support of the legislature. In the meantime, EMS services are struggling and need a short-term cash infusion to get their head above water, and then some long-term adjustments in reimbursements to sustain their operations.

This bill, as written, will create 8 new positions at the Maine EMS office, quadrupling their size, while putting significant obstacles to the distribution of this critical infusion of money. In the last legislative session 1 year ago, Maine EMS was given \$200,000 by the legislature to use for communities that wanted to evaluate their EMS system and make informed decisions about what they wanted for EMS response. That money has yet to be allocated, and the process for how to get the money hasn't been completed. Maine EMS has been spinning their wheels for 1 year. We cannot afford these delays when many EMS services are hanging by a thread.

We are thrilled that the money has been put in the budget, but strongly encourage you use the simple, straightforward, immediate allocation process submitted by Speaker Talbot-Ross, Senator Lafountain and Representative Salisbury.

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

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