

To: Sen. Donna Bailey, Senate Chair
Rep. Anne Perry, House Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

From: Kate Zimmerman, DO, FACEP, FAEMS of Yarmouth, ME

Date: February 8, 2024

Re: L.D. 2156 An Act to Authorize the Provision of Emergency Medical Treatment for Certain Dogs

I am testifying in support of LD 2156, as amended. I am a board-certified Emergency Medicine and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) physician, the lead author of the Maine EMS *Operational K9 Protocols*, and serve as the Associate State Medical Director for Maine EMS. Outside of the hospital setting, I work as the medical director of a specialized law enforcement team, embedded alongside tactical paramedics. We are there to provide care to civilians and our law enforcement officers should the need arise. Some of those officers are, and have been, our canine colleagues. These canines serve a vital role in the safety and success of our missions. In doing so, they are often placed at risk of sustaining life-threatening injuries. In return for their protection, we would like to continue to be able to provide them with appropriate emergency care should they become ill or injured.

In 2018, "An Act To Protect Persons Who Provide Assistance to Law Enforcement Dogs, Search and Rescue Dogs and Service Dogs" was signed into public law. This law allows immunity from civil liability for emergency medical services' persons (EMS clinicians) rendering aid to a working dog who is injured in the line of duty. Understanding that the EMS clinician, while working under their license in response to a medical emergency, operates under a set of statewide protocols, the Maine EMS Medical Direction and Practices Board (MDPB) drafted the *Operational K9 Protocols* for clinicians to utilize should the need arise. We restricted these to law enforcement and search and rescue canines as we felt that it was important to have pre-established relationships with the service, handler and veterinarian. These protocols were adopted in 2021. With the arrival of a new Assistant Attorney General to Maine EMS, there was concern that the statute would not protect EMS clinicians from criminal liability if working under a set of protocols to care for these canines. This is why the proposed legislation sits before you today. We are trying to do what is right and what is best for our clinicians and for our canine partners. We want to assure that the care is appropriate, commiserate with the clinician's level of training, scope of practice and is indeed best practice. These protocols were written with the expertise of Maine licensed emergency and critical care veterinarians, a national subject matter expert (with civilian and military veterinary experience) as well as canine handlers, EMS clinicians and physicians. It would be our intent to continue these collaborations with any future reviews and revisions.

It is my hope that our *Operational K9 Protocols* can be put back into service without the fear of criminal repercussions. Without them, our canine colleagues may be placed at increased risk of preventable deaths. It is important to understand that this legislation would affect a specialized subset of working dogs only - those assigned to law enforcement and search and rescue. Be it a small subset, these canines are valuable resources to the communities that they serve.

Thank you for considering my testimony.