

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs committee. Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, members of the Transportation Committee. I work for MaineDOT in Sherman. I am here on my own personal time. I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are grappling with a lot of complex problems at this time, and I appreciate the chance to speak today.

We are finding ourselves in a position where our long-term employees often retire from an arduous career, only to return directly to the working world because in today's world, they can't afford to retire. Our work has a very direct impact on public safety. We provide a level of service that the community benefits from day in and day out, storm after storm. In terms of public safety, I can't speak to the dollar amount for how valuable our work is; however, I will say that any one accident or tragedy that we had the means to prevent and occurs anyways is one too many. The fight for more funding for DOT workers implies and feels like the cost of these services are an inconvenience, and I want to challenge that implication. I want to show you we are worth that investment.

Our union agrees that quality of life for Maine citizens, as well as the union members among them is a paramount priority. When the wellbeing and health of Mainers is in question, I hope that we can all come to a consensus that finances be an afterthought and not a hindrance where we have an opportunity to make a very critical difference. We have a lot of potential growth that can be facilitated. We have seasoned veterans of all stripes, and trades and eager young workers yearning for meaningful and fulfilling employment. We have atrophy in our departments where we are losing opportunities.

We have work going to established private entities, where the community values are secondary as the checks change hands. I would ask how the people of our state would interpret the concept of these essential services being fulfilled by the lowest bidder, as opposed to allowing it to remain in the hands of dedicated members that share their communities, conditions, and quality of life after the fact. Our Union members consistently achieve less income for their efforts, but we do so to build an equity of trust to our families, friends, neighbors and taxpayers of our state. Our union members aspire to serve their state with reverence and respect but we need funding to do our part. These are some of the issues DOT workers consider as they work ceaselessly for literal days on end as they defend commuters, utility trucks, ambulances and school buses from adverse weather conditions. These same workers are now competing with contractors and losing more and more opportunities to add value to the communities that we are a part of.

I implore you to advocate for equity in opportunity. We need our future skilled workers to learn from our veterans, and acquire their ethics and values. We need to focus on workers that are working to add value to the taxpayer's dollar, and pass up those who are only interested in pulling those dollars in. We need to build equity in opportunity for our people and equip our state and citizens for modern and future adversities.

Thank you.

Thomas Frank