



STATE OF MAINE
Department of Public Safety
Office of State Fire Marshal
52 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0052

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL SAUSCHUCK
COMMISSIONER

SHAWN ESLER
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

March 2, 2025

LD 679 - An Act to Increase the Funding to the Live Fire Service Training Facilities Fund

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Shawn Esler, and it is a privilege to serve as the State Fire Marshal.

I write **neither for nor against** LD 679.

In 2023, the fire service across Maine responded to 178,463 calls for service. Those callouts included structure fires, explosions, technical rescues, hazardous materials events, emergency medical calls, and other hazardous situations. Every day, our first responders put themselves in harm's way to ensure the safety of the residents and visitors of our great State.

Maine is one of the few States that does not have a statewide fire academy, and we do not own any fire training facilities. Maine relies on the Maine Fire Service Institute (MFSI), a department of Southern Maine Community College to deliver fire training across the State. Funding for both MFSI and the Office of State Fire Marshal is appropriated through the fire insurance premium tax outlined in Title 25 section 2399. This funding does not cover the cost to fully support either organization, therefore we do not have the funds available to support repairing or building facilities.

While a centrally located statewide fire academy would be ideal, the initial cost would be high, and it would require annual support through the State budget. Additionally, meeting the needs of rural volunteer fire departments spread all over our State poses a challenge. In 2018, the Maine Fire Protection Services Commission conducted a gap analysis to determine the training needs of Maine's fire service.

Eleven (11) live fire training facilities and potential building sites were identified across the State that are within an hour's drive of most fire departments. A comprehensive and fiscally responsible plan was created, so that over time, these smaller cost-effective facilities could be repaired and built out to support firefighter training. Today, the State has funded the replacement of one facility in Yarmouth, the repairs of a facility in Auburn, and has constructed two facilities in Farmington and Farfield. More work needs to be done to repair and construct these facilities in northern, eastern, and downeast Maine to achieve that goal.

It's important that our firefighters have access to live fire training facilities for several reasons that include enhancing public safety, increasing firefighter safety and operational readiness, reducing liability for our communities, supporting recruitment and retention efforts, and equally as important, readying the next generation of first responders. Across our State, our firefighters stand ready to answer the call for help and training facilities greatly support that mission.

Shawn Esler, State Fire Marshal