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Testimony of Rep. Cheryl Golek introducing

LD 969, An Act to Increase Emergency Medical Services Provider Training Opportunities

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

Sen. Bailey, Rep. Gramlich and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, my name is Cheryl Golek and I represent District 99, which includes Harpswell and part of Brunswick. I am here today to introduce **LD 969, An Act to Increase Emergency Medical Services Provider Training Opportunities**.

We all know that access to emergency medical response services across Maine is essential to the state's healthcare system. Yet, as a state, we have struggled for years to address the shortage of Emergency Medical Service (EMS) workers. This shortage has led to longer response times, increased mortality rates and a strain on the existing EMS workforce. To highlight the seriousness of this issue, Wabi TV has televised a three-part series highlighting the critical state of Maine's rural EMS system.¹

In an attempt to stabilize our state EMS crisis, the 131st Legislature approved \$31 million² of the \$70 million that EMS officials requested to provide a lifeline while longer-term solutions could be considered. My understanding is that the original goal of that legislation was to shore up the state's eligible 260 EMS providers, many of which were on the brink of collapse. The Rules Committee of the Maine EMS Board oversees how the funds are disbursed and allocated \$9 million for training centers. There are ten training centers approved by Maine EMS in the state.

¹ <https://www.wabi.tv/2025/01/09/ems-crisis-maine-exposes-worst-case-scenario-rural-residents/>

² <https://themainemonitor.org/state-takes-step-to-combat-problems-surrounding-emergency-medical-services/>

The investment made in training was needed, but its structure left many opportunities for people wanting to become volunteer EMS workers out in the cold.

State EMS currently prioritizes using federal workforce grants for those training to become full-time paramedics or EMTs. Volunteers are given lower priority, limiting volunteers to 2 out of 20 seats in a class.

The demand for these classes is great, but there are not enough. Small communities need better access to classes, and more classes are needed in a variety of locations.

The current system does not meet the training needs of rural volunteer EMS workers. Maine has 340 registered fire departments.³ Many communities in Maine, particularly rural areas, rely heavily on volunteer firefighters, with 69.5% of departments being fully volunteer-run and 23.7% mainly being volunteer-run.

Given that volunteers solely or mostly staff the majority of our state's fire departments, we need educational training structures suitable for volunteer EMS workers. Currently, most training resources are directed at workforce development candidates. Many communities in Maine, particularly in rural areas, rely exclusively on volunteers to provide emergency medical services. Our volunteer EMS staffing is already dangerously low and will continue to decline, and local communities will continue to lose EMS coverage if we don't find ways to address this issue.

The shortage of EMS workers is a serious issue in our state. In June of 2023, a University of Southern Maine national study released in May by the Maine Rural Health Research Center revealed that 15 of the 16 Maine counties have so-called ambulance deserts, where people are located more than 25 minutes from an ambulance station.⁴ In the Northeast, Maine was ranked as the second worst for ambulance services.

LD 969, An Act to Increase Emergency Medical Services Provider Training Opportunities, brings an opportunity to fix one of the broken steps in this system. This one-paragraph bill directs the Emergency Medical Services Board to adopt rules to allow municipalities to conduct or host emergency medical services licensing and relicensing training. The allowance of local

³ <https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/registry/summary#c>

⁴ <https://usm.maine.edu/news/university-of-southern-maine-researchers-identify-ambulance-deserts-rural-healthcare-needs/>

training by a person qualified to give that training can add a needed tool to rebuilding and maintaining our essential EMS workforce.