



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep. Lori K. Gramlich in support of
**LD 882, An Act to Protect Communication with Providers of Critical Incident
Stress Management Peer Support**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and esteemed members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, I am Lori Gramlich. I have the privilege of representing the lovely seaside community of Old Orchard Beach in House District 131 and the distinct honor of serving as assistant House majority leader. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today as a cosponsor in support of **LD 882, An Act to Protect Communication with Providers of Critical Incident Stress Management Peer Support**.

This bill addresses an issue that I've worked on for the past four years, and I am very grateful to Representative Salisbury for bringing it forward. It is critically important that our first responders have access to the support they need to deal with individual traumatic events as well as the long-term implications of chronic exposure to traumatic events in the line of duty. As you have heard, that support is exactly what this bill would provide.

When I was a child, I lost my home to fire. It was one of the most traumatic events of my life. I was eleven years old, and for weeks and months after, whenever I heard a siren, I was brought back to watching my home burn. Ten years later, when I was in college, we had an industrial smoke detector activated in our dormitory, which of course required us all to evacuate the building in the middle of the night. Even then, a decade after losing my home to fire, I was still brought back to that one single traumatic event that impacted me. It continues to impact me even now.

I share this story as an example of how one single event can impact an individual. I know we all have had events in our lives that impact us, but our first responders – our brave men and women who fight fires and respond to other emergency situations – are exposed to traumatic events on a daily basis. Daily. And while critical incident management teams do indeed exist, they are not in every municipality, the wait lists are long, and they are not able to meet the need for support and intervention necessary to treat long-term chronic exposure to traumatic events, also known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Daily exposure to traumatic events can have a cumulative impact on people, and our first responders are particularly impacted. Not only do they have this chronic exposure, they also, just like you and I, have the daily stressors of life.

As some of you may know, I am a social worker and have worked in the public policy arena here in Maine for over 35 years. The underlying initiative I have focused on throughout my career has been ensuring folks are able to access the mental health care they need. Supporting LD 882 is a continuation of that work.

This bill would enhance critically important services in acute situations and ensure behavioral care services are accessible for the long term. We need ongoing services for all first responders, including firefighters, which this bill aims to provide.

I have one piece of feedback, which you may already have heard but I'd like to underscore. As drafted, the bill refers to "critical incident stress management peer support." Critical incident stress management and peer support are actually two distinct approaches to providing mental health care services to our first responders.

Critical incident stress management focuses on mitigating the impact of traumatic events through structured interventions, often following a specific incident, to help first responders process in the immediate aftermath. Peer support is an ongoing intervention where members, who share similar experiences and can relate to each other's struggles, provide emotional and social support to one another.

Both approaches are crucial if we are to provide first responders with both acute intervention and long-term, ongoing support. I would ask the committee to consider an amendment that clarifies the two and ensures that both are incorporated in the final report of the committee.

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