

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, members of the Labor Committee, I'm Captain Brandon Michaud. I am here on my own personal time to speak in support of LD 1236, An Act to Address Employee Retention of State Employees Who Are Firefighters at Bangor International Airport.

I have worked at Maine Air National Guard Fire Department since 2012. When I first applied and interviewed to be a Military Firefighter at the Bangor International Airport there was always 10 plus qualified applicants competing for a single position. Over the past 13 years I have seen less and less qualified applicants applying. Sometime we only have one or two qualified people for an opening. We are losing applicants to surrounding communities who work less hours per week and have no age requirement to retire.

Firefighting is a dangerous profession with the average life expectancy of a firefighter being 10 years less than the general population. Due to the nature of our profession, we are exposed to carcinogens not only from fires, fuel spills, and diesel fumes, but also from the Firefighting Foam and flame retardant personal protective gear we wear exposing us to PFAS-PFOAS, and other carcinogens. Firefighters have a 14% higher death rate than the average American as well as higher rates of cardiovascular disease, sleeping disorders, depression, post stress disorder, and respiratory illnesses.

Not only are we having less applicants, but we have also lost several employees to neighboring departments with better retirement packages. Employees that we have spent time and resources training.

Because our program is 100% federally funded there will be no fiscal impact to the State of Maine. Establishing a new special retirement plan for firefighters employed by the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management at Bangor International Airport that allows those employees to retire after 25 years of service regardless of age will have a positive impact by improving firefighter health and welfare as well as employee recruitment and retention.

Thank you to the committee for your time, and please support the DVEM Firefighters at Bangor International Airport by passing LD 1236.