

**LD 507, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue
to Fund LifeFlight of Maine"**

**Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
April 15, 2025**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee:

I am Trey Stewart; and I proudly represent Senate District 2, which includes several municipalities in Penobscot and Aroostook Counties. I am here today to speak to a very important public investment, LD 507, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Fund LifeFlight of Maine," which will improve access for critically ill or injured patients across Maine, whether originating in hospitals or emergency scenes, needing care at our major medical centers in Maine or beyond.

In critical illness, time and geography matter; and, as we have come to recognize, LifeFlight is an essential component of our emergency medical system. LifeFlight is a unique non-profit and the only healthcare provider in Maine supporting every community and hospital. LifeFlight literally gives vulnerable patients a second chance to return to their parents and family, to return to school and to return to their jobs. I am presenting LD 507 today to help make sure LifeFlight is there when we need them.

Three previous legislatures have supported building out infrastructure to assure access to LifeFlight's services. These public investments have included hospital helipads, which are literally the doors of band between hospitals, refueling depots in Aroostook County, weather stations at airports and hospitals, upgrading LifeFlight's communications and building out a low altitude instrument flight system acknowledging the challenges of Maine's often-changing weather.

Many of these investments were made over twenty years ago and we need to invest in assuring access to care for the next decades. These publicly-funded investments also help LifeFlight raise private philanthropic funds; and with the system LifeFlight has built, our investment has leveraged significant federal investment in runways, weather stations and LifeFlight's nationally-recognized instrument flight system for which they were just honored with the International Safety Award by the Vertical Association International.

I have provided a briefing document from LifeFlight outlining the projects anticipated in this bond; and for the people of Aroostook County, note the inclusion of a second airplane. Currently LifeFlight has multiple helicopters but only a single airplane; and when the airplane is out of service for required inspections or maintenance, we lose access to longer distance transport when the helicopters are unavailable due to weather or previous missions. In addition to access to care for Aroostook County, the airplane provides all of Maine with more all-weather operations and the ability for critical patients in Maine to receive very specialized care in centers such as the Cleveland Clinic, John's Hopkins or Philadelphia Children's.

I am happy to answer questions but will rely on the technical experts from LifeFlight who will also present to answer your questions. Many thanks for your time and I sincerely hope you all will join me in supporting access to life saving critical care.



LD507: An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Fund LifeFlight of Maine

LifeFlight is proposing to work with the legislature to enact a bond to fund critically needed aviation infrastructure. Through public private partnerships, LifeFlight has built a first in the nation comprehensive low altitude aviation infrastructure to assure the highest levels of safety and reliability for LifeFlight to be there when needed.

Background

LifeFlight is a unique nonprofit, the only healthcare entity serving every Maine community and hospital. Working from bases in Sanford, Lewiston, and Bangor using helicopters, fixed wing airplanes, and specialized ground ambulances LifeFlight serves over 2,500 patients per annum, around seven patients per day in every corner of Maine.

In 1998, Maine was the only state in the country without access to medical helicopters. In addition to being economically challenged and one of the most rural states by population density, Maine has the most complex and hostile aviation weather of any state other than Alaska. Extremes of temperature, dense forests, coastal and inland mountains, the Labrador current (fog), and a service area of over 40,000 square miles including hundreds of islands are combined challenges to 24/365 operations.

As compared regionally and nationally, LifeFlight aircraft fly over twice the average number of patients and operating hours per annum. LifeFlight provides comprehensive critical care support for Maine's emergency care system ranging from interhospital transport for premature newborns to the complex patients on full cardio-pulmonary bypass. In addition to LifeFlight's role in supporting emergency interhospital transport, LifeFlight provides direct response to emergency scenes supporting ground EMS services. LifeFlight responds to remote areas and islands, major multi-patient events such as the Lewiston shooting, and supplies critical personnel and equipment to hospitals during major events.

Aviation Infrastructure: Access, Safety, and Reliability

To assure the highest level of safety possible, from the outset, LifeFlight of Maine committed to a systems approach to build a "safety envelope" environment around our patients and employees assuring the highest level of operational safety and reliability possible. LifeFlight leads the nation in the use of instrument flight, the highest level of safety and has invested substantially in state of the art aircraft, navigation systems, and training.

Through combinations of public and private funding, LifeFlight has worked to build out a comprehensive infrastructure for Maine. These projects have been supported by previous bond issues in 2003, 2009, and 2012 with the Maine DOT and Maine Department of Public Safety, Congressionally Directed Spending, the USDA Rural Development Program, Maine Emergency Management, the FAA, the National Weather Service, hospitals, and private philanthropic family and healthcare foundations. The infrastructure built by these private/public initiatives includes:

- 33 hospital and 10 community helipads
- Over 1500 pre-determined emergency landing areas (PELA's) and 120 Remote access LZ's to reduce ad hoc emergency operations.
- 17 automated weather systems at small airports and hospitals with 6 undergoing replacement by the FAA
- 35 weather cameras on FAA site (LifeFlight and Maine Emergency Management Agency)
- A statewide communications system (also used by the MANG for emergency operations in areas where they do not have comms.)
- Over 100 helicopter instrument procedures at hospitals and islands (supported by the FAA)
- Multiple new LPV runway procedures for alternates (supported by the FAA)
- A RNP 0.3 low altitude ZK route network covering the entire state (supported by the FAA)
- 2 fuel trucks for small airports with over the road capability to refuel helicopters at hospital helipads.
- Runway rebuilds/ extensions in Stephen Bean Airport in Rangeley, Newton Field in Jackman, and Eastport Municipal Airport.



2025 Bond Briefing Document



LifeFlight infrastructure engineer inspecting an AWOS on Monhegan.



A LifeFlight helicopter lifts off the helipad at Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor.



A weather camera operated by LifeFlight overlooking the runway in Rangeley.

LifeFlight Bond Proposal

While LifeFlight has been able to build this system, including obtaining FAA support for our instrument flight operations and a national demonstration precision performance-based aviation navigation system, further investment is required. In the air, the FAA continues to support our instrument flight system and LifeFlight continues to innovate, working with the FAA on a national demonstration precision performance-based aviation navigation system. On the ground, existing infrastructure is aging and in need of renewal, and gaps in critical infrastructure must be filled.

While patient reimbursement breaks even with operating costs and LifeFlight's capital costs are supported by its charitable LifeFlight Foundation, infrastructure similar to other public investments is a public good providing timely access to the highest level of care in an emergency to the people of Maine.

This proposal will allow renewal of hospital helipads, replacement of twenty-year-old weather and communication systems, improve fuel availability to improve response times and assure safety margins at the extreme of the helicopter ranges in Aroostook County, and help provide a second LifeFlight airplane to assure coverage when the current aircraft is in for inspections and maintenance. The bond proposal includes:

- **Assisting hospitals in rebuilding helipads and heliports.**

Total: \$4,150,000

Hospital helipads are the "doors" to critical emergency access a patients need transfer from community to tertiary hospitals in Maine and beyond.

- **Assisting hospitals and airports to establish fuel depots.**

Total: \$2,160,000

On site fuel availability decreases post flight turnaround times to improve access, and support long-distance operations.

- **Upgrading LifeFlight's communication system for coordinating multiple agency response.**

Total: \$875,000

A communications system allowing VOIP and satellite tracking and voice communication to provide flight coordination including other agencies responding to Maine for mutual aid.

- **Replacing 10 of 17 automate weather observing systems at hospitals, airports, and islands.**

Total: \$1,300,000

Filling in the weather gaps between major airports with FAA supported AWOS systems coupled with new weather camera technology to provide real-time views of weather conditions for flight planning.

- **Purchase an airplane to expand LifeFlight's transport program to assure 24/365 capacity.**

Total: \$5,000,000

LifeFlight has one airplane which was manufactured in 1998. We have just made substantial investments in new navigation technology but when it is in required or unscheduled maintenance the aircraft is not available to patients, approximately 40% of the time. A second aircraft will assure patients needing long distance emergency transport in Maine or beyond LifeFlight is there to meet their need.

Questions? Contact Tom Judge, LifeFlight of Maine Project Officer, at tjudge@lifeflightmaine.org or 207-576-3329.