



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Ann Matlack

130 Scraggle Point Road
Spruce Head, ME 04859
(207) 594-4831

Ann.Matlack@legislature.maine.gov

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Testimony of Rep. Ann Matlack in support of

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

Before the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and respected colleagues on the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee. My name is Ann Matlack and I represent House District 43, which includes the communities of Cushing, Thomaston, South Thomaston, St. George and part of Owls Head. I am here today to testify in support of LD 507, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Fund LifeFlight of Maine.

As with previous LifeFlight bond issues, LD 507 will provide capital investment for projects at various hospitals, communities and airports around Maine. LifeFlight will manage these projects so that all the proceeds from this bond go towards the public good.

I live in St. George, where we sometimes joke that fog was created in our town. Having accurate, functioning and available weather monitoring and cameras is essential to safety and flight decisions, as we who live along the coast know well. With this bond, 13 new Automated Weather Observing Systems (AWOS) will be installed at hospitals, on islands and at air strips. On the coast, replacement weather stations will be placed on Monhegan, Matinicus, Vinalhaven, Stonington and Bar Harbor, and the FAA will put a new weather station at the airport in Belfast.

Additionally, the FAA will replace nine of the 16 AWOS previously installed using bonds, USDA funding and congressionally-directed spending. These systems will be located at airports and LifeFlight will support all of the maintenance on these stations. With MEMA and now one of the woodland companies, they have installed 35 weather cameras and are planning another 11 installations.

The bond will help with updating communication relay towers, which are also used by mutual aid helicopters from Boston MedFlight, Dartmouth Hitchcock and the military.

The bond will help rebuild nine hospital helipads.

It will allow LifeFlight to update fuel farms at major receiving hospitals and install small fuel farms at hospitals in Aroostook County. Previous bonds helped Northern Aroostook Regional Airport in Frenchville and Northern Maine Regional Airport in Presque Isle obtain fuel trucks then worked with the airports to manage the fuel. Rapid refueling saves time for patients.

If fully funded, this bond will help with the purchase of a second airplane so there is a backup when the current airplane is out of service for inspections and maintenance. Assuring access via the airplane is especially important to Aroostook County. It provides more all-weather capability and improves long-distance efficiency, freeing up the helicopters. It opens up distant medical centers like the Cleveland Clinic, Johns Hopkins and Philadelphia Children's Hospital to patients in Maine needing very specialized care not available in New England.

With the FAA and MDOT, LifeFlight continues to work on runways and has rebuilt runways in Rangeley, Jackman and Eastport, and they are gradually rebuilding the entire airport in Machias. The FAA is supporting their national demonstration project on low-altitude instrument flight precision navigation system.

In addition to the projects anticipated by the bond, LifeFlight has worked with the FAA and MDOT to bring other public investments into healthcare access and improving the safety of flight.

All of these public investments help to raise private funds to support LifeFlight's helicopters, medical technologies, education and infrastructure.

I urge the Committee to approve this bond issue.