



LD507: An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Fund LifeFlight of Maine
Testimony in Support Thomas Judge
April 15, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of our Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee:

With thanks to our sponsors for supporting LifeFlight and access to care through this proposed legislative initiative. My name is Thomas Judge, and I reside in Port Clyde, Maine. I have been involved in delivering EMS in Maine for over fifty years from as a provider, administrator, and member and chair of the Maine EMS Board. I have also been honored to found and develop LifeFlight including working with the legislature on our three previous bond issues.

When we started LifeFlight in 1998, Maine was the only state in the country without a dedicated air ambulance, nor any semblance of a system to support safe helicopter operations. Unfortunately, in my time on the Maine EMS Board and as Chair, my colleagues and I knew the harsh costs of not developing a system approach to safety and reliability. Through all of my national and international work including currently serving on the federal Air Ambulance Quality and Patient Safety Committee I continue to see the costs of not systemizing safety.

In 1998 there was literally no aviation infrastructure to support operations. Only two of our community hospitals had rudimentary privately built helipads, most of the state was not covered by aviation weather forecasting, there was limited refueling capacity especially in Aroostook County, no EMS statewide communication system, a very early trauma system, and no ability to operate low altitude instrument flight, the safest gold standard in aviation and especially important in Maine as we have the most complex aviation weather in the US outside of Alaska.

Together with the Legislature and people of Maine we have worked diligently to build a system safety aviation infrastructure. Our briefing sheet highlights the significant advancements since our humble beginnings. All of these efforts are strictly focused on improving access, safety, and reliability. Together with initial healthcare system investment, philanthropy, and hugely important public investment in infrastructure we have built LifeFlight into an internationally recognized and award-winning service improving healthcare outcomes for now thousands of Mainers.

We have long postulated that EMS is a “public good” and the legislature has now recognized EMS as an essential service. An important piece of assuring the public good is an

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infrastructure supporting access to, safety, and reliability of EMS services. We have worked with three previous legislatures in helping to provide the capital funding for infrastructure along with also bringing significant federal and private investment in support.

LD507 will help continue those investments, updating and filling in the gaps of infrastructure that is now more than twenty years old. many of which are more than 20 years old. Hospital helipads and runways are the doors into and between hospitals, a granular weather system beyond major terminal-based weather, fuel, and communications are all critical elements of a safety and reliability-based system.

We note in working with our federal delegation and the Maine DOT we have found funding for runways and to replace nine automated weather observation stations at small airports and the FAA is now supporting all of the instrument flight elements of the system including a national demonstration project for precision instrument flight in which the FAA is developing the system in Maine as the test bed nationally.

Recognizing the challenges LD507 will assure much needed updates to hospital helipads across the state, update and add new weather stations at hospitals and islands, build refueling capacity to save time as well as supporting rural airports, update our statewide communication system that we also use for mutual aid events like the responses to the Lewiston shootings and Farmington explosions, and add to LifeFlight's capacity with a second airplane essential to our longer distance transports in Maine, all weather operations, and enabling Mainer's to reach very specialized care beyond New England such as the Cleveland Clinic and Philadelphia Children's.

This a system approach to improving access to care and safety. We recognize the current economic challenges but there is no other means to fund these long term public good capital investments all of which support lifesaving care to critically ill and injured Mainer's. As with each of the previous bonds, LifeFlight is committed to managing projects on behalf of the public investment without overhead to assure one hundred percent of the public investment purchases the needed access to healthcare improvements anticipated by the bond.

I am happy to answer questions and attend the work session if requested to provide more technical information.

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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.



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.