



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Thank you Mr. Chair, Senator Joe Rafferty, Madam Chair Kelly Murphy, and the esteemed members of The Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Representative Mike Lance of district #79 (Paris, West Paris, Sumner and Woodstock), I am also a member of the Paris Fire Department.

I am here to speak in support of Representative Hyme's bill, LD- 1759, "An Act to Allow Firefighters to Be Eligible for State College Funding".

A little about my fire service. I am a per-diem firefighter, meaning I have a pager and radio and respond when I am available (the station is 4 minutes down the road). I started with BLS (Basic Life Support), but I now have EVOC (Emergency Vehicle Operating Course), Interior Attack, Hazmat, Extraction, Ladders, and Ambulance Assist training. Last year, Paris Fire had 502 call-outs. While fire training is essential, only a small percentage of the calls were fires. In addition to grass and structure fires, I also worked:

- lift assists
- car accidents
- CO alarms
- smoke detectors
- welfare checks
- flooded basements

We do it all and our training has to be diverse. Like other small towns in Maine, we provide mutual aid with 3 other towns: West Paris, Oxford, and Norway. All of the training I have received has been through grants, other departments, my department and "on the job". I would have greatly benefitted attending the Maine Fire Service Academy.

This bill would help remedy one of the greatest problems we have in Maine right now regarding public safety, the lack of well-trained first responders.

This bill reduces one-time funding provided in Public Law 2025, chapter 2 for the State's 7 community colleges to continue offering student scholarships through the State's free community college tuition program for eligible persons who graduate high school or obtain the equivalent of a high school diploma in 2024 or 2025 by \$800,000 in fiscal year 2025-26 and appropriates \$800,000 on a one-time basis to the Maine Fire Service Institute. It is my belief that many young people in my community and state wide would commit to this profession if they had the financial assistance for the training necessary. I strongly urge you to vote, "ought to pass" on this critical bill. I will try to answer any questions you might have.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

FACING THE FIRE SERVICE OF TOMORROW – TOGETHER

April 25, 2025

Dear Maine Fire Service Professionals,

The modern fire service is standing at a crossroads.

Today's challenges aren't just about fires, motor vehicle crashes, or medical calls. They're about preparing the next generation to handle all of it—and to do so with the knowledge, skill, and professionalism that today's fireground and legal environment demand. But we're seeing a troubling trend emerge with the "right now generation"—a growing impatience with process, a desire for immediate results, and at times, a lack of appreciation for the depth of responsibility that comes with wearing the badge of a fire officer.

At the Maine Fire Service Institute, we know that meaningful training takes time. It takes careful planning, review, and alignment with evolving NFPA standards—many of which change every five years. Each change must be studied, absorbed, and reflected in our curriculum. That's not something you rush if you care about quality. That's something you *build*. And we're building it with purpose—Maine purpose.

Our programs aren't cut-and-paste national templates. They carry real Maine flavor. That means when you're serving as a fire officer and responding to incidents, you aren't just thinking about how to stretch a line or run a command board – you're thinking about Maine law. You know when to notify the State Fire Marshal's Office. You know how to engage with Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, DEP, DHHS, Maine Forest Service and more—because missing a step in that process can land your department in legal hot water faster than any fire ever will.

Let's be crystal clear: ignorance of the law or operating standards is not an excuse in today's fire service. When you're in a position of responsibility, you're expected to know your job—and do it well. MFSI is committed to giving you every tool to succeed, but it's up to each of us, individually and collectively, to embrace the commitment to train hard and train right.

We need to raise the bar in fire service training across Maine—not lower it for convenience. This is about protecting each other, our departments, and the people we serve. It's about building a future where the next generation is not only capable, but confident, competent, and fully prepared for the realities they will face. So let's stay the course. Let's be patient where patience is required. And let's never stop demanding excellence of ourselves and those who stand beside us.

Train hard. Train smart. And never forget who's counting on us.

With the highest of respect, and a reminder to be safe when the bell sounds, we need you all.

Jimmy

