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Testimony of Representative Holly Eaton introducing
**LD 1676 – Resolve, to Study Ways to Improve Recruitment and
Retention of Rural Emergency Medical Services Personnel Through
Access to Health Insurance**
Before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Representative Holly Eaton, and I'm honored to represent House District 15, which includes the towns of Deer Isle, Stonington, Brooklin, Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Frenchboro, Swan's Island, Isle au Haut, and Vinalhaven. These are small, rural communities, many of them island towns, and every one of them struggles with maintaining adequate EMS coverage.

On a personal note, I served as a volunteer firefighter when I was in high school. I know how closely connected and absolutely vital these volunteer departments are to the safety and wellbeing of rural Maine. I also recently joined the board of Memorial Ambulance Corps, where I've had the opportunity to listen, learn and witness firsthand the growing challenges EMS services are facing in our part of the state.

This bill was brought to me by several constituents in my district who see clearly the need to create a more supportive system that entices volunteers to remain involved in their local EMS programs. I also consulted with Memorial Ambulance Corps during the drafting of the initial language, and their input was instrumental in shaping this proposal.

We are at a critical juncture. Rural EMS providers—many of whom are still volunteers—are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff. Even when people feel called to this work, they're more often drawn to urban areas, where they can make a living and access essential benefits like health insurance. Volunteer departments are losing people not because they lack heart, but because people are trying to support their families—and need jobs that offer stability.

LD 1676 is a step toward understanding what might help change that. It doesn't promise to fix the system overnight. It simply asks the Department of Public Safety to study whether access to health insurance might improve recruitment and retention in rural EMS. This is not a new

District 15: Brooklin, Deer Isle, Eagle Island Township, Frenchboro, Southwest Harbor,
Stonington, Swan's Island, Tremont, Isle au Haut, Vinalhaven

mandate, and it doesn't require any sweeping policy changes. It is an opportunity to gather information and consider long-term solutions.

I believe this is a community issue, not a partisan one. Whether Democrat, Republican or Independent, we all need emergency protection when it comes to our homes and families. When someone calls 911, no one asks a volunteer EMT their party affiliation. We're all neighbors, and we all want the best-trained, most committed people responding to those calls. This resolve is about supporting our local EMS teams — the people who show up when it matters most — and ensuring they have the support they need to keep showing up.

In closing, I hope the committee will allow this bill to move forward—not out of a belief that it must lead to immediate policy changes, but because we need a roadmap. We cannot keep expecting rural EMS departments to function under increasing strain without asking what they need and how we can help them, sustainably and sensibly. Long-term planning begins with a conversation, and that's what this bill invites us to begin.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'd be happy to answer any questions.