

Good afternoon,

My name is Max Newton and I am a firefighter/paramedic for the town of Scarborough. I am honored to be here today to speak of the importance of preventative cancer screenings for firefighters. Last March I had a routine preventative ultrasound performed by United Diagnostic Services. I went to the ultrasound with no symptoms and no health issues. As a result of the ultrasound a 0.9cm mass was found on my thyroid. Follow up ultrasounds and a biopsy revealed that I had Papillary Thyroid Carcinoma (Thyroid cancer). Again, I had no signs or symptoms that I had cancer and the preventative ultrasound is the only test that detected it. Since the preventative ultrasound I have undergone two surgeries (one last Tuesday) to remove my thyroid and seven lymph nodes. I will undergo a radioactive iodine treatment this summer to eradicate the remaining cancer cells as the cancer has spread to my lymphatic system as well.

My case is not unique. There were at least six other firefighters that I know of that had serious medical conditions discovered during preventative ultra sounds last year, including one other firefighter who had the same cancer as me. It is not a stretch to say this screening saved our lives, and I still believe it is the best money I have ever spent.

I am one of the lucky ones who had a highly treatable cancer with a very low mortality rate when caught this early on. I was also lucky that my department shared the availability of the preventative ultrasounds and I was able to afford the \$350 dollars for the ultrasound. There are many firefighters out there who may not be able to afford the cost of these preventative screenings. Some departments are working towards covering at least part of the cost of the screening, but many more simply can not afford to cover these screenings.

This is especially true of many of the volunteer fire departments in Maine. For example, at my local volunteer fire station in Readfield we use every dollar of our budget to make sure our vehicles, equipment, and gear are functioning and ready to serve our residents. Covering the cost of the cancer screenings for our 25 members would add \$8,750 to our yearly budget, roughly a ten percent increase. This may not seem like a big increase, but in small towns like Readfield and hundreds of other small towns in Maine that is a huge increase to a fire department budget.

In 2024 308 firefighters were honored at the International Association of Fire Fighters memorial weekend, with 75% of those honored having died from occupational cancer. This makes cancer the leading cause of death in firefighters.

Cancer prevention, including the elimination of PFAS chemicals from our gear, is gaining more and more attention, but does not change the years of exposure that thousands of firefighters have already encountered. Catching the early signs of cancer in firefighters is the best way to prevent future line of duty deaths, and these preventative screenings are the best way to detect the early signs and stages of cancer.

Thank you for hearing my story and my experience with preventative cancer screenings.