

**Testimony in support of LD 2081**

**February 9, 2026**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Mark Roberts, I live in Scarborough, and I am a Senior Fire Investigator at The Office of State Fire Marshal. In that capacity I served as a K9 handler for the State of Maine from 2016 through 2023 with my partner, K9 Deacon, a yellow labrador retriever. Deacon is now 12 years old and retired. He lives with my family and is, thankfully, in generally good health.

Being a working dog takes a toll. Years of high-impact work, repeatedly jumping in and out of vehicles, operating in dangerous environments, harsh weather, and unpredictable fire scenes, create long-term physical strain that often doesn't fully present until after retirement.

Although Deacon is no longer working, retirement does not erase the years of service he gave to the State of Maine. It has been a great privilege to bring him into my home as part of my family. However, from the beginning, there was always the potential that his service could result in significant veterinary costs later in life, which can be costly for any family to manage.

When fire investigators retire in good standing, the State recognizes their service by continuing health-related benefits. There are currently presumptive laws that provide workers compensation benefits for both police officers and firefighters that acknowledge the cost of service does not end on the last day of work. Extending similar consideration to our retired working K9s, who served under the same hazardous conditions, is a matter of consistency and respect for the role they played as living, breathing members of our teams.

I understood the risks and the potential financial responsibility when I accepted the role of handler. But I would hate to see a future, highly qualified and motivated candidate hesitate, or decline entirely, because of uncertainty about the long-term care of a retired working dog.

This bill does not guarantee payment for unnecessary or frivolous expenses. It simply gives the chief officer the discretion to evaluate legitimate veterinary needs and approve coverage when appropriate.

Realistically, the amount of time during which I may personally benefit from this change is likely short, if at all. Sadly, a 12 year old dog often sees his best years behind him. But future handlers will face the same challenges I have faced, and their decisions will shape the strength of these programs moving forward. For those reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to vote in favor of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,



Mark J. Roberts