

Senators, Representatives and Committee members,

We appreciate you taking the time to hear and/or read my testimony. My name is Nicole Loupe, and I am testifying on my own time. I am a Captain at the Maine Air National Guard Fire Department. I am requesting members of your committees work to ensure funding for LD 1236 in the supplemental budget, LD 2212. I wanted to give some insight behind LD 1236 -An Act to Address Employee Retention of State Employees who are Firefighters at the Bangor International Airport.

I have worked at the Maine Air National Guard Fire Department since 2010. I have seen a lot of changes over the years, but our primary mission has always been to protect the military and civilian aircraft on the airfield. Aircraft Rescue Firefighting is something that requires specialized training and only a select few departments in the country have the responsibility of providing that type of coverage. We must train on various types of aircraft and keep our certifications current through aircraft live fire training, and classes for the FAA. We also use Class B foam, which most other departments don't use. In conjunction with aircraft rescue firefighting, we also provide fire protection for the hangers, fuel farm and other structures on base. In 2015, we were provided with a structural fire engine. Around that time, we signed mutual aid agreements with many of the surrounding towns and our call volume rose tremendously. In 2025, we responded to 87 mutual aid calls, 35 HAZMAT calls, 96 EMS calls, 17 aircraft inflight emergencies and many other responses, which totaled approximately 430 calls.

As you know, firefighting is a dangerous profession. On average, our life expectancy is 10 years less than the general population, and due to being exposed to an abundant variation of toxins, to include Class B foam, we have a 9% higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer. Our job is also high stress, resulting in sleeping and eating disorders, mental health issues, respiratory illnesses and cardiovascular disease.

Most of us have the "25 years of service AND 55 years old" retirement, which is outdated, having been enacted in 1998. Due to the negative impact on our health, and lack of recruitment and retention, we ask that you prioritize funding LD 1236- An Act to Address Employee Retention of State Employees Who Are Firefighters at Bangor International Airport. This would allow those who are employed as firefighters at BIA to retire after 25 years of service without penalty.

From all of the DVEM firefighters, we thank you for your time and support in considering funding for LD 1236 with this year's budget surplus.