

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, I am Nickolis Cote. I am here on my own personal time to speak in support of funding LD 1236, An Act to Address Employee Retention of State Employees Who Are Firefighters at Bangor International Airport, as part of LD 2212.

I have been a Military Firefighter for the Maine Air National Guard Fire Department at the Bangor International Airport in Bangor since 2023, a year after graduating high school. My responsibilities consist of driving Aircraft Rescue Firefighting equipment and responding to both Aircraft and Structural emergencies. As many may have heard, there was a major crash at the airport in January, which just so happened to be on the shift I am on. During the incident, we all have to work around hazardous conditions, inclement weather, and freezing temperatures. Many other firefighters from our station also responded off duty to assist with the incident.

As many might expect, firefighting is a dangerous profession. Due to the nature of our profession, we are exposed to carcinogens not only from fires, fuel spills, and diesel fumes, but also from the Firefighting Foam and flame retardant personal protective gear we wear exposing us to PFAS-PFOAS, as well as other carcinogens. Firefighters have a 14% higher death rate than the average American as well as higher rates of cardiovascular disease, sleeping disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and respiratory illnesses.

LD 1236 An Act to Address Employee Retention of State Employees Who Are Firefighters at Bangor International Airport is estimated to require a **one-time** funding request from the general fund of \$500K. We are asking for legislation to allow State employees who are Firefighters at Bangor International Airport to retire after 25 years of service without penalty.

All expenses for salary, benefits and equipment are 100% Federally funded with zero expense to the State of Maine. To hire firefighters, we must have similar retirement plans with area Fire Departments. To continue to provide high-quality fire protection to the Maine Air National Guard and the Bangor International Airport we ask that you support DVEM Firefighters at Bangor International Airport by funding LD 1236 in this supplemental budget, LD2212. Thank you.