

Members of the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee and the Veterans & Legal Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Eric Campbell, and I serve as a Captain with the Maine Air National Guard Fire Department. I am here on my personal time to request that all members of your committees work to ensure funding for An Act to Address Employee Retention of State Employees Who Are Firefighters at Bangor International Airport, as part of the Governor's proposed Supplemental Budget, LD 2212

I have been a State of Maine employee for more than 24 years, beginning my career with the Department of Corrections before becoming a State Firefighter in 2007. I also retired from the 101st Air Refueling Wing after 22 years of service in the Maine National Guard, including 18 years as a firefighter and five overseas deployments.

Under the current retirement structure, firefighters must complete 25 years of service **and** reach age 55 to retire without penalty. LD 1236 would remove the age-55 requirement and allow retirement at 50% after 25 years of service, with no minimum age. For someone like me—approaching 25 years of service—retiring at age 50 would result in a 15% penalty, simply for not meeting the age threshold. This penalty forces many firefighters to continue working well past the point when the physical demands of the job remain safe or sustainable.

Firefighting is uniquely strenuous work. Years of emergency responses, hands-on training, physical fitness requirements, disrupted sleep cycles, and exposure to toxic environments take a cumulative toll on the body. Our protective gear itself contains PFAS, adding another layer of long-term health risk. Many members of the Maine ANG Fire Department spend their entire careers in frontline roles, and the physical strain compounds year after year.

For those who begin their careers around age 20, the current system effectively requires 35 years of frontline firefighting duties. That level of physical endurance becomes increasingly unrealistic—and unsafe—as firefighters age. I am now old enough to be the father of many of our firefighters, and in fact, I am the father of one of them. The idea that firefighters must remain in these roles until age 55, regardless of physical wear, is simply not aligned with the realities of the profession.

LD 1236 has already passed both the Senate and the House. State Firefighters are asking for parity with the State Police and State Fire Investigators, who already have no minimum age requirement. This change would also support retention. We have already lost several firefighters to departments offering better retirement programs, and this bill would help us remain competitive. The cost to the State is minimal—an initial one-time funding charge—while all future funding is fully reimbursed by the federal government under our Master Cooperative Agreement.

On behalf of our entire department, I respectfully ask for your support to ensure that LD 1236 moves forward this session and is not carried over again.

Thank you for your time and for your continued service to the people of Maine.

Eric Campbell