

Testimony in Support of Portions of LD 2212, Language UU-1 (page 65)

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the
Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety**

February 25, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Gattine, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is James A. Graves, and I serve as Director of the Maine Fire Service Institute at Southern Maine Community College. I am here today to speak to Sec. UU-1 within the language portion of the Governor's 2026–27 Supplemental General Fund Budget, LD 2212, found on page 65.

Under Maine law, specifically Title 20-A §9004, Southern Maine Community College and the Maine Fire Service Institute have fiduciary responsibility for administering these grant funds on behalf of the Maine Fire Protection Services Commission. We take that responsibility seriously. These funds are intended to support fire service training facilities that directly impact firefighter, training, safety, readiness, and operational effectiveness across this state.

The \$1.5 million appropriated in Public Law 2023, Chapter 459 was designated for critical improvements to fire training infrastructure. These are not discretionary projects. They are essential investments in the men and women who protect Maine's communities.

We have executed formal agreements for these funds, including:

- A new fire training facility in the City of Auburn – 50% paid to date
- A new fire training facility in the City of Bangor – 50% paid to date
- Facility repairs in the Town of Yarmouth – 0% paid
- Safety upgrades in the Town of Farmington 0% paid

These are signed commitments with municipal partners. The work is real. The need is real. The communities are counting on us.

However, circumstances outside of our control have delayed full expenditure of the funds.

Specifically:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permitting requirements related to the Auburn training facility have extended timelines beyond what was originally anticipated.
- Contractor-related supply chain constraints have further impacted project scheduling and material availability.
- Heavy frost across Maine may delay groundwork.

These delays are administrative and logistical, not a lack of planning, not a lack of effort, and certainly not a lack of need. The projects are moving forward. The agreements are in place. The partnerships are active.

Without the carry-forward authority outlined in Sec. UU-1, these unexpended funds would lapse at the end of FY 2025-26. That outcome would undermine signed agreements, delay critical infrastructure improvements, and disrupt training access for firefighters across Maine.

This provision does not request new funding. It simply preserves the Legislature's prior investment and allows it to be used for its intended purpose, improving fire service training facilities that serve both career and volunteer departments statewide.

When we invest in training facilities, we invest in firefighter survivability, compliance with national standards, recruitment and retention, and operational readiness. Those investments protect not just firefighters, but the citizens they serve.

I respectfully ask this Committee to support Sec. UU-1 and allow these funds to carry forward so we can complete the work already authorized and deliver on the promise made to Maine's fire service.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to public safety.

Respectfully submitted,

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