

Testimony **IN SUPPORT** of LD 1316

An Act to Provide Funding for the Maine Length of Service Award Program

May 9, 2019 9 AM before the

Criminal Justice & Public Safety Legislative Committee

Sen. Deschambault & Rep. Warren (Co-chairs) and honored members of the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee, my name is Stephan M. Bunker of Farmington. I am here as a proud member of the LOSAP Board of Trustees (MRS 5 sec. 3371), also as a volunteer firefighter in my 43rd year of service. I am also a longtime member of my hometown Board of Selectmen. It is from all three roles that I offer testimony in support of LD 1316.

As this is not a new topic for consideration by this committee, the LOSAP effort twice supported by this committee, only to fail in Appropriations. I can not tell you how frustrating it has been as a LOSAP Trustee to have spent countless hours in formulating the rules and process to implement this program, the method of investment, accrual of service credits vesting schedules and more. We have campaigned statewide to build support and enthusiasm among the volunteer fire & EMS community for this program. Despite past failures to fund this effort, we remain strong in our desire to bring this to a reality.

As a longtime firefighter I can tell you that since my entrance to the department, we have gone from a 45 member department, with a long waiting list, to today's ranks of 15, 6 of whom are paid fulltime members. My community has been forced to pay a heavy price in funding fulltime members in order to help guarantee a minimum response. Simply put, our firemen are an aging group, with few younger applicants to join our ranks. Most of the members are self employed and have no retirement program to participate in. Many are unable to leave work for daytime calls. Fire calls that once could be handled by our own department, now require multiple mutual aid departments in order to muster an adequate response.

As a longtime selectman, I have seen my department and our neighbors struggle in recruitment and retention, with their numbers continuing to drop. For volunteers, after years of dedicated service there is little or no financial reward for efforts at retirement, as they do not qualify for traditional retirement programs as do their fulltime counterparts.

For the majority of our area departments, many respond as EMS first responders, with our region has long response times from our hospital-based ambulance service. Here too, volunteer EMS members are in short supply, with no program to entitle them to any type of annuity to vest in.

While the passage of this bill may not be the single solution to our dilemma of recruitment and retention for fire & EMS personnel, it will certainly create a program that will certainly add value to those who serve with satisfactory participation and be a recruitment and retention incentive for those considering fire or EMS as a volunteer.

As a LOSAP trustee I need this program in order to meet our statutory responsibility & make a difference in the fire & EMS volunteer community. I am in hopes that it will not take a dreadful event to cause us

to ask, why didn't we do something earlier. Sadly, too many public policy decisions stem from the loss of life or serious injury. I ask that this committee issue a unanimous vote to pass, and follow thru with a strong message to the Appropriations Committee to do likewise. With the advent of additional federal funds flowing to Maine, this is a prime opportunity to finally address this program.

I would be pleased to answer any questions from the Committee.

Respectfully;

Stephan M. Bunker

LOSAP Trustee