



MEMORIAL AMBULANCE CORPS

May 10, 2021

Maine State Legislature
Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am writing in support of LD 1605, An Act To License Ambulance Drivers Who Are Not Licensed To Provide Emergency Medical Services.

I am a resident of the Town of Deer Isle in Hancock County. I serve as the President of the Board of Trustees of Memorial Ambulance Corps—Isle au Haut—Stonington—Deer Isle. I am a Maine licensed EMT.

Memorial Ambulance Corps is a ground ambulance service licensed under the Maine Emergency Medical Services law and rules at the EMT level and permitted to the paramedic level. We were organized in 1967 as an independent nonprofit corporation and are not part of any municipality. We are supported by service fees and donations, not by local tax revenues. Although we pay our crews nominal compensation for their service, we are essentially a volunteer organization. We currently have 16 licensed EMTs and 13 ambulance drivers. Each ambulance run is staffed by two EMTs and one driver.

Our ambulance drivers have all passed the Ambulance Vehicle Operator's Course, and we require them to hold current CPR certifications. In addition to being responsible for getting the ambulance swiftly and safely to the scene of an emergency and to the hospital, our drivers play an essential role in patient lifting and transfer to the stretcher, in extrications and in loading into the ambulance. Drivers have primary responsibility for communicating and coordinating with the RCC dispatch center. When required, drivers also participate in CPR. Many of our EMTs started their volunteer service as drivers. In sum, our drivers perform essential functions for Memorial Ambulance, and, without them, it would be difficult for us to meet our obligation of providing 24/7 service.

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Notwithstanding their service alongside our EMTs, our drivers are treated unequally under Maine law. Three areas in particular are the focus of our concern: death benefits, Maine EMS license plates and COVID vaccines.

Death Benefit. Maine law provides a death benefit for emergency personnel that die in the line of duty. We are all grateful for the expansion of this law that took place last year, but, while coverage of our EMTs is explicit, the law remains at best ambiguous as to whether our drivers would be entitled to the benefit. I have been seeking official confirmation of this entitlement, but without success to date. I find it hard to understand how it could be justified that, in the case of a fatal ambulance accident, an EMT sitting in the passenger seat would receive a death benefit, whereas a non-EMT driver would not.

EMS License Plates. Several years ago, Maine authorized specialty Emergency Medical Services license plates. Although the law referred broadly to EMS, its wording allowed only EMTs to receive the plates. The reasons supporting the issuance of such license plates are equally applicable to our drivers. As a volunteer service, we carry pagers and respond to the ambulance bay when a 911 call is received. EMS license plates can help with clearing traffic to enable both EMTs and drivers to proceed without delay. Off-duty drivers may also respond to the scene of an emergency in their personal vehicles, particularly for lift assists or CPR calls. EMS license plates can help expedite those responses and help any traffic control personnel distinguish between responders and mere onlookers. To the extent the specialty plates are viewed as an honorific, I would argue that our drivers are just as entitled to the recognition as our EMTs. Indeed, some of our drivers volunteer for as many duty shifts as our most dedicated EMTs.

COVID Vaccines. When the COVID vaccination program was initially announced, we were advised that our EMTs would be in Group 1A to receive the vaccine, but our drivers would not be vaccinated until Group 1B. Although vaccines have since been made available to all our personnel, we are concerned about the disparity and the precedent it may set for future vaccination or health care programs. We have taken steps to reduce driver contact with potentially infected patients during the pandemic, but there will still inevitably be times when we need their direct help in lifting and moving our patients. Our drivers' lives are just as important to us as those of our EMTs. There may be multiple factors leading to the disparate treatment of our drivers, but one appears to be the lack of accurate tracking of the identities of non-EMT ambulance drivers by Maine Emergency Medical Services.

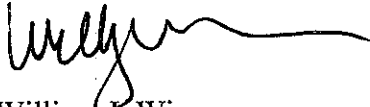
LD 1605 would redress these inequalities by recognizing the ambulance driver role officially. It should also bring drivers into the definition of "emergency medical services persons licensed under Title 32, chapter 2-B" for purposes of the death benefit and EMS license plate laws. Maine EMS would have a definitive record of licensed ambulance drivers so that future vaccine and similar programs would have no problem identifying them.

To the extent there may be concerns about the cost of background checks for drivers, I can only say that Memorial Ambulance already runs background checks on new driver candidates and does not see that as burdensome.

If you have any questions or require further information, I can be reached at the address indicated above, by email at president@memorialambulancecorps.com or by phone at 207-348-5686.

Our drivers put themselves at risk every day to help protect our community. I hope you will agree that it should be a priority to treat them fairly.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wiegmann', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

William J. Wiegmann
President
Board of Trustees
Memorial Ambulance Corps