

Good Morning Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and Distinguished Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is William. St. Michel, retired Fire Chief from the Town of Durham and the current Executive Director for Maine Fire Chiefs' Association.

I would like to ask for your support of LD 1803, An Act To Attract and Retain Firefighters and Emergency Medical Services Personnel through the Maine Length of Service Award Program. LD 1803 would enable the LOSAP Board to start funding the Length of Service Awards Program. LD 1803 requests \$2,500,000 starting in fiscal year 22 – 23.

The volunteer fire service is struggling with recruitment and retention issues. We have been struggling for quite some time but the pandemic and the ensuing labor shortage have exasperated that struggle to crisis mode. There is not a week that goes by without a news report or article discussing the staffing crisis for fire and EMS. They talk about extended wait times for emergency response, the lack of staffing and unfortunate outcomes. It is imperative that this issue is addressed for the well-being of the communities and the citizens of the State of Maine. LOSAP is one of many pieces necessary to address the recruitment and retention issue in the volunteer fire service.

December 21, 2021 Maine Fire Chiefs Association after much deliberation crafted and delivered a letter to Governor Mills highlighting six primary areas that we felt needed immediate action to hopefully avert going to a crisis of catastrophic proportion. The funding of LOSAP was one of those six. The Fire Service was struggling to recruit and retain members before the pandemic, as we emerge from the pandemic the struggle to recruit at a pace to keep up with age, departures and increased demand for services will intensify. As we move to address this increased demand the most effective way to ease the tension will be to have everything possible in place to improve retention.

The 119<sup>th</sup> Legislature recognized the issue and the need to address recruitment and retention in the volunteer fire service, with the creation of the Fire Commission in 1999. Recruitment and Retention was one of the initial charges, "Recommendations for recruitment and retention of volunteers, including a length-of-service incentive program for volunteer firefighters." The 127<sup>th</sup> Legislature realized it was no longer just a need but urgent when they passed LD 164 which created the LOSAP Board in 2017. The first session of the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislature appropriated \$500,000 under LD 1316 to start the design phase. I sincerely hope that the second session of the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislature will pass and fund LD 1803 establishing the funding mechanism to start addressing this serious issue.

For the Safety of our citizens and our visitors we can't afford to delay this critical piece of the solution. I hope you will support LD 1803! Thank you for your time and your service.

William St. Michel  
Executive Director  
Maine Fire Chiefs' Association