

Testimony in Support of LD 1280
An Act to Invest in Maine's Fire Service Training Facilities

Senator Beebe, Representative Salisbury and distinguished members of The Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is William St. Michel, I am the retired Fire Chief of The Town of Durham and currently The Executive Director for Maine Fire Chiefs' Association. I am also an Emeritus Member of The Maine Fire Service Institute Advisory Committee and have been actively involved in the Fire Service since 1973.

Maine's Fire Service is in crisis! We struggle with staffing. The lack of firefighters and the increasing need to provide services to our communities has created a dangerous situation for our citizens and guests. That shortage has created an extremely unhealthy competitive situation for staffing among our service providers. Staffing is a serious issue no matter where we look in today's society, but it is imperative that we repair the issue in our emergency response system; everyone's safety depends on it. The Fire Service is diligently working to attract new members and retain existing ones.

Training new members, maintaining skills for existing members has always been difficult. However, with a better understanding of environmental impacts, the opportunities presented with the use of acquired structures to practice and hone the necessary skills no longer exists, which only heightens the need for facilities. Training needs to be done in environmentally friendly, safe, and controlled conditions. In order to accomplish this, we need to build an infrastructure of facilities across the State. A system that is capable of handling the need but also strategically placed to provide accessibility coupled with a local support system. A network of training facilities within an hour of 90% of the firefighters in the State.

Training Events are rarely less than eight hours, coupled with prep time, setup time, pickup time, cleanup time and return to service time it is a rarity that does not equate to a twelve-hour day. The only pieces that we have to work with aren't even in the equation above; they are accessibility and availability. LD 1280 would continue the process that would alleviate that.

LD 1280 would continue the process of adding approved facilities within an hour of 90% of the firefighters in the State! We can ill afford to attract and retain members only to lose them to a lack of accessible, available, quality training.

I would like to ask for your support in moving this critical Legislation forward! The Fire Service and the Citizens desperately need LD 1280.

Thank You,
William St. Michel