

Testimony

Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, and members of the committee, my name is John Crowley and I'm the Chief Forest Ranger Pilot for the Forest Rangers of the Forest Protection Division of the Maine Forest Service. I'm here today to testify in support of LD 305 **An Act To Include Forest Rangers and Forest Fire Prevention Specialists in the Bureau of Forestry's Forest Protection Unit in the Laws Concerning Cancer Suffered by Firefighters.**

Ranger Pilots fly helicopters to drop water on forest fires in support of the Rangers who are fighting fire on the ground. These fires are often in the Wildland Urban Interface where the homes meet the forests so the fuel for these fires is not just trees and bush, but also structures such as homes and out-buildings, cars, farm equipment, tire piles, and trash dumps. There is no way to get at the fire without flying through the smoke and it is not unusual to smell the trash or chemicals that are burning. Much like the Rangers on the ground, we are breathing smoke for hours at a time with no way to get out of it while still doing our jobs. In 2020, Ranger Pilots assisted in suppressing 112 of the over 1,100 fires that Rangers responded to during last season. And that just includes the suppression efforts. It is not unusual for aircraft to be needed in the days after a fire to assist with the mop up and lifting gear and equipment out of the fire site so that it can be returned to the Ranger Station for cleaning and repair, to be used on the next fire.

I would also state that Ranger Pilots are dual rated in both helicopters and airplanes and we refuel our own aircraft sometimes as often as four to five times a day, exposing ourselves to fuel vapors from jet fuel and avgas, both of which have been linked to kidney cancer (Siemiatycki et al. (1987))

I'd also like to add that Forest Ranger Pilots go through the same training as the ground Rangers and have the same law enforcement and fire authority as those ground Rangers. Some of us were unit Rangers on the ground before we were Forest Ranger Pilots, so I would just like to ensure that though Ranger Pilots are not listed in the title, they are Forest Rangers and there should be no confusion that they are eligible for the benefits of this bill.

With that, I ask for your support in voting yes on LD 305

John Crowley
Maine Forest Service

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