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130th MAINE SENATE

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Testimony of Senator Scott Cyrway
L.D. 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
Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
February 22, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester and members of the Labor and Housing Committee: I am State Senator Scott Cyrway and I represent Senate District 16, which includes Albion, Benton, Clinton, Fairfield, Unity Township, Waterville and Winslow. I am before you today to present L.D. 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.

In 2009, a change was made to the Worker's Compensation Act to include a presumption that firefighters who contracted cancer as a result of their firefighting duties would be included. Today, the law covers active duty firefighters, those employed by the State Fire Marshall's office, and active members of a volunteer fire association.

We are all aware that firefighters have a dangerous, but critical role; whether it is fighting an out-of-control campfire, house fire, or forest fire - the risks associated are many. One risk in particular comes from the exposure of carcinogens, which can lead to cancer. Over the last decade or so cancer amongst firefighters has become a more broadly discussed topic - both at the State House and even in the local newspaper as you read obituary after obituary of firefighters who have lost their life to a battle with cancer. Studies conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health show that firefighters have a nine percent increase in cancer diagnosis and a 14 percent increase in cancer-related deaths than members of the general U.S. public.

Not included in current law are Maine Forest Rangers and Forest Fire Prevention Specialists who also play a critical role in fighting fires. These men and women keep us safe as they fight fires here in Maine, and at times are deployed to other parts of the country to help with large-scale fires. In 2020, they responded to over 2220 fire investigations. Many times the cause of the fire is unknown so as they go to investigate them and put them out, they are coming into close contact with recently suppressed materials such as plastics, tires, vehicles, etc. that emit harmful toxins.

This legislation simply adds Forest Rangers and Forest Fire Prevention Specialists to Title 39-A §328-B so that they receive the same attention other firefighters receive when faced with cancer as a result of the heroic work they do. I hope you will strongly consider supporting this legislation and I am happy to answer any questions you have, but would note that you will be

hearing from those in the firefighting profession today that will likely be able to provide you with more information.