

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, and the Labor and Housing Committee.

My name is Ben Goodwin. I'm a District Forest Ranger for the state of Maine. I am testifying on my own accord and do not represent my agency here today.

I tell people all the time that I am living the dream and that is true. There are not too many people that can say they love what they do, but I am one of them. I have been a Forest Ranger for 10 years and have been the Downeast District Ranger for the last 2 years. I am very proud to wear my uniform and serve our state. I looked into other careers in the different law enforcement agencies but chose to be a Forest Ranger because it allows me to be more proactive and not reactive in protecting the people of Maine. Now, you have the chance to be proactive in helping protect the Rangers of this great state. Being a supervisor, I believe one of my main responsibilities is to make sure my Rangers go home safe to their families every night. We all know that being a Ranger comes with some degree of risk, but I believe this bill will help protect and give peace of mind to the Rangers knowing they will be covered if they should get cancer from serving their duty.

You have or will hear about rangers fighting wildfires, I would like to discuss a part of our job that poses a high-risk factor for cancer, which is the enforcement of the open burning laws. This, I believe, is where we are most vulnerable to the toxic chemicals that can cause cancer. One of our top burning violations is the burning of unauthorized material. These unauthorized materials can consist of plastics, styrofoam, lead paints, motor oil, tires, and fiberglass, just to name a few. You name it, and I would bet you one of our Rangers have seen it

being burned. This is where I feel our Rangers are the most exposed to the carcinogenic chemicals that can cause cancer. As law enforcement officers, our duty is to go to these calls and stop the burning of these materials as soon as we can to help protect the surrounding people from this toxic smoke. I have been to many of these calls where someone is burning a pile of tires or an old boat and do my best to mitigate the risk of exposure. But now as a supervisor, I have to send my guys to these calls knowing they will be exposed to these chemicals and what that could do to them. It's not the immediate exposure that worries me as much as its long-term effects that this exposure to these toxic chemicals could do. If you should support this bill, it would not only show your appreciation to all of the Maine State Forest Rangers for what we do and the risks we take to protect and care for the people and resources of Maine, but it would also give us all mental and emotional comfort to know that we would be protected and covered by you if we should ever be diagnosed with cancer.

I would like to thank everyone for their time and for listening to me. I hope you will consider supporting this bill and supporting the great Forest Rangers we have to protect the people and natural resources of Maine. Please let me know if you have any questions

Part of our job as Rangers is we are tasked with fighting wildfire and enforcing burning laws throughout the state. These wildfires must be put out to help protect the people of Maine and its natural resources. Last year was one of the busiest years on record. Many of these fires are in our unorganized territories of Maine and we are the only resources to fight them. Unlike structure firefighters, it is not

feasible for us to wear full bunker gear or breathing protection to help mitigate the risk of smoke and other chemicals we might encounter during fighting the wildfire. We often fight these wildfires all day long in the smoke and ash for many days until we get it under control. I have come home many times after a wildfire covered from head to toe black with ash and coughing up black soot from the fire. We do the best we can to stay out of the smoke and protect ourselves, but you can't mitigate all the risk factors in fighting wildfires. While we are tasked with fighting wildfires we can also encounter structure fires in the unorganized areas of Maine. With many fire departments struggling for manpower and resources, we do our best to save and protect any structure we can. These structures pose a very different threat to us. We do not know what is in the structure and what toxic chemicals that may be coming from the fire. We feel that it is our duty to help save and protect these structures the best we can, again without full bunker gear or breathing protection.