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*Department of Maine*

Senator Luchini

April 26, 2021

Representative Caiazzo

Members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee

My name is James Bachelder from the Department of Maine Veterans of Foreign Wars. I am testifying on behalf of our Commander Michael "Keith" Davis and the Membership of our organization and its Auxiliary. We strongly support LD 1537 "An Act to Restore Funding to the Southern Maine Veterans Cemetery".

Around 21 years ago Frank Soars with the Maine Bureau of Veterans Services submitted a press release. The state was looking for free land in southern Maine to build the state's 4<sup>th</sup> Veterans' Cemetery. State Representative John Tuttle knowing about this press release call me to get the local Veterans' Organizations together to discuss what we could do to have the cemetery in the Sanford area. This was the beginning of the Southern Maine Veterans Memorial Cemetery Association (SMVMCA).

The state passed a bill to pay for the architectural plans that also obligated the state to administrate/managing/caring for the grounds. After 10 years of negotiating for free land and the construction, the grounds were dedicated and opened for services. The freshman state representative that began the work on the bill, Roger Landry, is the first person buried in the cemetery. Roger knew as a freshman legislator he would not be able to bring the bill forward so he asked the last WWII Veteran serving in the state house, Walter Wheeler, to sponsor the bill and here we are now.

Over the last 11 years we have had phew complaints. There were adjustments that were needed to minimize the damage the equipment makes in order to perform the usual tasks. In the last couple of years, we have had more complaints due to the dry conditions we are experiencing in southern Maine. We have been under Abnormally Dry to Moderate Drought conditions. The last 2 areas where the pre-placed vaults are look great because they have irrigation systems. The rest of the grounds depend on employees to place the sprinkler system and reposition it periodically. There are not enough staff to perform all the work necessary to maintain the grounds and it is very apparent in the summer.

If you take a drive thru the two cemeteries here in Augusta the grounds are well cared for because of the staffing levels. The same ride thru the Springvale cemetery is not so heartwarming. We are not asking for more then any of the other three cemeteries. We are just asking for the same as all the other cemeteries. We are just asking the state to honor the obligation it made when it passed the bill that created the Southern Maine Veterans' Cemetery.

Respectfully Submitted

James E.N. Bachelder

VFW Department of Maine Legislative Committee

Past Department Commander