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**L.D. 1537 "An Act To Restore Funding to the Southern Maine Veterans Cemetery "
Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
April 26th, 2021**

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and honorable members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee – my name is David Richmond, and I am the Director of the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services. I am here today to testify neither for nor against LD 1537 "An Act To Restore Funding to the Southern Maine Veterans Cemetery"

Up until recently, the Southern Maine Veterans Cemetery (SMVC) was fully staffed with a field crew of three: one working Supervisor, one Equipment Operator, and one Groundskeeper II. SMVC had great difficulty filling the Equipment Operator position last summer, having to post the position four times before finally finding a candidate and filling the position. Recognizing at that time that the pay for this position was not sufficient to attract candidates, we submitted a functional job assessment to have the position upgraded to an Equipment Operator II, and the upgrade was approved. The funding for this action is an initiative in the current Governor's supplemental budget proposal. In a recent change to the staffing level, the Equipment Operator resigned to accept another position outside of state government. SMVC has already posted the vacant position twice and we have hired a temp employee to augment the staff.

To further reduce the workload on the SMVC staff, we have released an RFP for a seasonal mowing and trimming contract that closes on April 27th. MBVS plans to fund this contract with our federal account, as we do with the two Augusta cemeteries. Given the difficulty we have had in filling state field positions in this area, a contract will allow the staff to focus on completing burials, installing headstones, and performing routine maintenance. Despite the challenges we have had in recruiting and retaining staff and recent necessary curtailment and reallocation; SMVC has not lost any funding, the bureau is actually proposing to allocate more resources to the cemetery, from our current program.

The Southern Maine Veterans Cemetery, like the other three locations in the state, is a unique and beautiful example of our state's landscape. Our bureau remains committed to striving to maintain the cemetery to the highest standards of the National Cemetery Administration in keeping with this hallowed ground.

I thank you for hearing testimony on this bill and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Respectfully,
David A. Richmond
Director, Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services