

*129th Legislature*  
*Senate of*  
*Maine*  
*Senate District 11*  
*Waldo County*

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Testimony Presenting LD 1014  
An Act to Attract and Retain Firefighters

Good morning Sen. Deschambault, Rep. Warren and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Erin Herbig. In the Maine Senate, I proudly represent the people of all 26 towns in Waldo County: Belfast (my hometown), Belmont, Brooks, Burnham, Frankfort, Freedom, Islesboro, Jackson, Knox, Liberty, Lincolnville, Monroe, Montville, Morrill, Northport, Palermo, Prospect, Searsmont, Searsport, Stockton Springs, Swanville, Thorndike, Troy, Unity, Waldo, and Winterport.

I come before you today to present LD 1014, "An Act to Attract and Retain Firefighters."

In Maine, about 93 percent of fire departments are either entirely or primarily staffed by volunteers, according to the Maine State Federation of Firefighters.

And as many of you may know, over the last several years Maine has seen a significant decrease in the number of volunteers signing up to be firefighters, despite increasing demand for fire services.

Falling rolls have caused delays for fire services and increased insurance rates for homeowners who live further and further away from active departments.

Recognizing this problem and hoping to strengthen recruitment and retention across volunteer fire departments statewide, we passed LD 164, "An Act To Establish the Maine Length of Service Award Program," in the 127<sup>th</sup> Legislature. A board was appointed the following year and has been at work ever since.

This bill, LD 1014, provides funding to the Maine Length of Service Award Program to provide length of service awards to eligible volunteer firefighters and emergency medical service personnel. By awarding volunteers some money based on how long they've served, this program will help fire departments attract and retain volunteers.

This is a model we know works because numerous other states have implemented LOSAPs, including Wisconsin, Iowa, Colorado, California, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland

and Connecticut. California, for example, was struggling to recruit volunteers back in 1980. They decided to implement a LOSAP, and here's what the California State Firefighters' Association has to say about why they did:

“The men and women who volunteer to fight California's fires play an important role in the firefighting effort. They leave their jobs and their families to answer this special call to service. In light of continued state and local budget cuts, their role has greater significance to the fire departments who depend on their dedicated volunteer service. Now there is a way to acknowledge the value of those years of dedicated volunteer service – without placing undue strain on the fire district and department resources.”

I couldn't agree more.

Maine's public safety systems, communities and families depend on our often overstretched and underfunded fire departments, and we have neglected their needs for long enough.

Let's be clear. This is a bill about rural Maine and our state's refusal to do much about the fact that we're struggling to recruit and retain firefighters for our communities.

I grew up going to the Belmont Fire Department for chicken barbeques with my uncle because he was a volunteer firefighter.

Our fire departments are more than emergency responders. They are our relatives, neighbors and integral members of our communities. They deserve better.

I'd also like to thank the chiefs and volunteer firefighters who took even more time away from their paid jobs to be here today to advocate for this critical funding.

They are very qualified to answer the questions you may have today.

I'm eager to work with the committee on resolving this issue.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any of your questions.