

April 22, 2019

RE: Testimony in Support of LD 1480 "An Act To Modify Retirement Plans for Fire Investigators and Sergeants"

Good morning Senator Bellows, Representative Sylvester and members of the committee. Thank you for being here, my name is Mark Roberts, I live in Scarborough and am here to speak in support of LD 1480. I am not representing any group or agency with my testimony.

I think it is important for you to know where this bill was born from and how we got here today. I have been a fire investigator for the State Fire Marshal's Office since 2008 and started to see a trend in which my coworkers were getting sick with cancer, five of them to be exact, not counting those others that I knew of but didn't work directly with. This prompted me to do some research to see why this was happening and ultimately, what I could do to prevent it from happening to me, my coworkers and those that will follow me. I love my job and the challenges and rewards that it provides. I also have two young daughters and a wife at home who are more important than anything else. As a result, I cannot just throw my hands in the air and hope the job doesn't kill me and make my family pay the price.

What I found through my research didn't surprise me, but it did concern me. All the research that I found agreed, chronic exposure to fire scenes causes or contributes to much higher cancer rates than the general population. Instead of dwelling on the danger I shifted my focus to the solution, this too was clear in all the same research. All the data agrees, there is a statistically significant increase in cancer rates and incidences for those who work in this field for more than 20 years. So much so, that when combined with age related risk, working more than 20 years and until at least age 55 presents a nearly 50% cancer risk that can be reduced to 15% through this proposed retirement change.

With the combination of exceptionally high cost of cancer care, high risk of cancer to this group of workers and the state as a self-insured this measure also provides millions of dollars in savings for perpetuity by reducing the expense of cancer care through prevention.

The firefighter cancer workers compensation presumption exists for all Maine firefighters who based on annual statistics respond to less than 6 fires per year with their fire department. The average fire investigator will respond to over 80 fires per year so a reduction in at least 5 years of service will also reduce exposure to 400 or more fires.

At an average annual medical cost of \$200,000 per cancer incident with a total average of \$700,000 per incident and the newest cancer medications costing as much as \$60,000 per month, any reduction in cancer incidents will surely save the state money.

Our New England neighbors already have substantially similar plans, New Hampshire and Vermont with a 20-year retirement and Connecticut with a plan exactly the same as designed in this bill, for what they determine to be Hazardous Duty occupations, just like this.

It is not often that State Government is presented with an idea that can either save lives or save money, this bill does both.

I have submitted with my information packet that includes relevant research and a clear explanation of the risk and savings, letters from people who could not be here today but who wish to have you hear their messages of support.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of connected loops and curves, representing the name Mark J. Roberts.

Mark J. Roberts