



## MAINE STATE FEDERATION of FIREFIGHTERS



**Testimony of Ken Desmond**  
**Speaking for the Maine State Federation of Fire Fighters**  
**In Support of LD 1014**  
**An Act to Attract and Retain Firefighters**

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Ken Desmond and I am the President of the Maine State Federation of Fire Fighters. (MSFFF) and a member of the Maine Fire Protection Services Commission.

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The Federation represents more than 7,000 volunteer, call and permanent fire fighters throughout the State of Maine. Our Legislative Committee has voted unanimously to support LD 1014: An Act to Attract and Retain Firefighters.

For more than three centuries Maine and the rest of America have relied on volunteers to provide the bulk of their emergency response services. Through their dedicated service, volunteer and call responders save Maine's cities and towns countless millions of dollars annually. We were all reminded earlier this month of the dangers every firefighter faces every time they respond to a call.

Maine, like the rest of the U.S. has seen a significant downturn in the ranks of volunteer and call fire fighters.

While precise figures are difficult to determine, most in the fire service believe that the overall number of volunteer and call fire

trend. Our membership is down by approximately 25 percent since 1995.

There are several reasons for the decline. Some, such as economies of scale through consolidation, more efficiency in emergency response operations and better training and equipment are positive. These changes though come with a cost. They put much greater demand on the call and volunteer first responders to maintain peak levels of response training and readiness. Emergency responders now find themselves juggling the additional personal time required to maintain their proficiency with the current economic and social demands of a busy world. Unfortunately for all of us, many are leaving the fire service.

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The consequence of all of this is a decline in call and volunteer fire department rosters. Many departments are unable to respond to emergencies without relying on mutual aid from surrounding communities.

We all recognize that mutual aid among communities is an effective way to leverage resources. Mutual aid though was never designed nor was it intended to take the place of local fire departments. The primary reason a municipality maintains a local department after all is to respond to incidents quickly when emergency services are most effective.

We believe that all of us must work to maintain uniform and effective emergency response services throughout the State.

Call and volunteer emergency responders are absolutely critical in a predominantly rural state like Maine. We must work to reverse the decline in their numbers before we reach the point where someone dials 911 and no one is available to respond.

In 2015, the 127<sup>th</sup> Legislature passed LD 164 An Act To Establish the Maine Length of Service Award Program. (LOSAP) It is now 5 MRS §3372. The law established the policies and procedures for qualifying for benefits and it created a board of trustees to oversee the program. It did not however provide any funding.

The law does not mandate any municipality to contribute to or to administer the program. The \$2,500,000 provided in LD 1014 will allow baseline funding for all call and volunteer firefighters who meet “credible training and response” criteria for all municipalities. Local cities and towns can but are not required to add to the program to enhance the potential benefits for its members.

Many of us in the Maine fire service have worked for more than 25 years to make LOSAP a reality for Maine municipalities and fire departments. The funding provided in LD 1014 will at last make LOSAP a reality for Maine fire fighters.

We strongly encourage you to support LD 1014.

Thank You.