
Police Department

As the Chief of Lewiston; the second largest city in the State of Maine and one of only five departments that holds the distinction of being nationally accredited, I would urge passage of this bill so as to allow a non-residential training academy when needed.

Due to COVID and other concerns, it has been increasingly difficult to obtain a spot in the conventional residential police academy in our state. This is the only option the entire State of Maine has at this time. There are several reasons in which it would be beneficial to adopt a nonresidential law enforcement training program. This is also not a new phenomenon in the US; roughly 50% of law enforcement training programs in the US are non-residential platforms. Other non-residential training programs across the US have been found to be successful, and Maine currently recognizes training credentials received from those programs out of state. Also, Maine has implemented the use of non-residential training programs in the past. In fact, we have officers at our police department that attended these and we were very pleased with the results of the non-residential training program.

As I previously mentioned, our agency is one of five in the State of Maine that is currently a nationally accredited agency. While the accreditation is an honor, it also comes with restrictions and standards that other agencies in the state do not face. While other agencies can place officers through Phase 1 and Phase 2 and allow them for work up to a year without the police training academy, accreditation standards prohibit us from that option. Our new hires have been waitlisted for the academy on several occasions in the past several years for various reasons. There have been considerable wait times, sometimes up to a year before we have been able to get a new hire into the academy.

The academy has had varying standards for what determines eligibility to the police academy, such as hire dates and unlimited academy spots to those agencies that have a Cadre assigned to the training academy. While the latter is an option to ensure spots for new hires to the training academy, the current training academy has not always had availability for new Cadres to the training academy to ensure those training spots. Historically, we have always hired a new officer just before the academy starts, however, we have now been forced to hire officers immediately to obtain the start date. These officers are not yet allowed to conduct police work at our agency, but instead do menial jobs and ride-along for sometimes up to year before being able to attend the academy. This is not very cost effective to the agency, nor is it beneficial or enticing to the new officer. The officer remains stagnant in his/her progress and training in police work.

Aside from the issues specific to our agency related to accreditation, I believe there are many other added benefits to a non-residential academy. A secondary training academy location in and of itself is a positive thing; Maine is a very large geographical state. While in some cases it may make sense for agencies to send officers to MCJA for the training program, there are many areas in the state where it would be more practical for the agency and/or officer to commute to the non-residential training location.

Recruitment and retention in the profession of policing has also proven to be a challenge in the past several years, and I believe a non-residential training academy would limit the strain on a new officer. Many of these young officers have family and responsibilities at home, and a non-residential 18 week academy would limit the strain on their personal lives. Police work in the state of Maine is a not a residential profession. Officers do not leave home for days on end to complete a work cycle. Officers must commute in for their shifts and work to establish a healthy set of habits that allows them to balance their stressful profession and their home life. By allowing for a non-residential academy we would be properly training officers for the reality of the profession that they are entering, all while receiving mentoring during this difficult and important transition phase.

In closing, there are numerous circumstances in which a non-residential training academy could be a better fit for a new hire and/or a specific agency, and I would urge lawmakers to support and pass this bill.

