Testimony of the Maine State Law Enforcement Association

In Support of

LD 2094 Resolve, to Require the Establishment of a Stakeholder Group to Examine and Improve the Recruitment, Retention and Wellness of Law Enforcement Officers

January 29, 2024

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Kevin Anderson, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine State Law Enforcement Association (MSLEA). I am here to speak in strong support of LD 2094 Resolve, to Require the Establishment of a Stakeholder Group to Examine and Improve the Recruitment, Retention and Wellness of Law Enforcement Officers.

MSLEA represents approximately 400 full-time law enforcement officers throughout the state, including the Capitol Police Officers who are in this building protecting all of us today. The one thing that all our members have in common is that they have chosen law enforcement as their career.

I started my law enforcement career as a Maine Game Warden in 1997 after 26 weeks of education and training, first at the Maine Criminal Justice Academy and then at Advanced Warden School. I wanted to be a Game Warden because it was something I believed in very strongly. When I applied to be a Game Warden, there were only 15 positions available throughout the state, but over **1500** applicants for those 15 vacancies. In recent years it has been hard to attract even 100 applicants. Twenty-six years ago, obtaining a job in law enforcement was *competitive* and *desirable*. Unfortunately, fewer people are now choosing law enforcement as their career.

The recruitment, retention, health, and wellness of law enforcement in this state is a critical issue. *We currently have hundreds of law enforcement positions unfilled, leaving our state, its people and natural resources more susceptible to crime and its vulnerable citizens at greater risk of victimization.* Our law enforcement officers are the cornerstone of maintaining order and

peace in our state. They protect our people as well as our natural resources. They are the ones we call upon when people are at their worst or are in the most need of help. They deal with the unimaginable on every shift. Yet, their chosen profession often requires them to be on call 24 hours a day, negatively impacting their mental and physical well-being. Very few professions require their employees to put their lives at risk while mandating that they be available round-the-clock daily due to scheduling and staffing shortages. For the same starting salary as a law enforcement officer, that same person can work at any number of occupations where they are not risking their life, sacrificing time with their families, and jeopardizing their health.

Nationwide, law enforcement agencies are struggling to recruit and retain employees. Maine is no different. Law Enforcement across the state is struggling to find out how to best attract good-quality candidates and keep them happy, healthy, and employed in order to keep our communities safe. We need to better understand what it is that brings potential employees to this career field, what keeps them here, what can be done to improve their overall health and wellness during their time as law enforcement officers, and how law enforcement can improve the services they provide to the communities they serve. These are just some of the questions that this bill looks to answer. Once we have the knowledge, the information can be shared with law enforcement agencies throughout the state to make improvements in all the areas mentioned. The end product will benefit law enforcement leaders and their employees for years to come, as well as the citizens these public employees serve.

In summary, this bill looks to find out how to attract good candidates to the law enforcement career, how to keep them when they are here, how to keep them physically and mentally healthy, how to understand the impact of the media and public narrative on law enforcement, and how law enforcement can better serve the public by better understanding what the need is and what kind of programs can assist in this effort.

I want to thank Senator Jackson for presenting this bill and Representative Dodge, Senator Beebe-Center, Senator Curry, Senator Farrin, Senator Harrington, Senator Hickman, and Senator Rotundo for Co-Sponsoring this bill. I would like to thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions you have.