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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

LD 210 - An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

**Neither For Nor Against Part VVV, PUBLIC SAFETY, Part A, 0712 - STATE POLICE Z227
CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACADEMY – 0290 and 0291 COUNTY JAIL OPERATIONS FUND**

February 4, 2025

Sen. Rotundo, Rep. Gattine, Sen. Beebe-Center, Rep. Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Rebecca Graham and I am testifying neither for nor against public safety initiatives contained within LD 210 to provide context regarding the importance of strengthening services that are provided to all communities and appropriately supporting the impacts of state policy placing a significant burden on local budgets.

Concealed Firearms Licensing. In 2021, MMA worked with the Maine State Police (MSP) Office of Weapons and Professional Licensing Unit to study identified gaps in accessing vital information necessary for the appropriate evaluation of concealed weapons permits following a reduction of staffing created by Public Law 2015, Chapter 327, also known as Constitutional Carry legislation. The joint report submitted to CJPS on that effort and issues regarding the permit process can be reviewed under Public Law 2022, Chapter 619 and is available here:

<https://legislature.maine.gov/testimony/resources/CJPS20210505@OPLA132877753332753574.pdf>

While Public Law 2015, Chapter 327 was enacted and assumed that there would be a reduction in concealed firearms licensing requests, there has been no reduction in applications at either the local or state levels. One reason for this may be the reciprocity for carrying in other states that Maine permit holders enjoy. The language in LD 210 does not indicate an intent to providing greater support for municipalities with no existing contract with MSP for concealed weapons permitting, Part VVV establishes a database that MMA hopes could be used in future to aid additional municipalities in this process and protect the integrity of Maine's concealed carry permit program.

Maine State Police Staffing & Services. Every police agency in this state is reliant on the services provided by the Maine State Police, which in turn is reliant upon the political will of this body to appropriately resource. As the investigation of criminal activity has become more complex, and mental health resources are lacking state-wide, and more acutely in rural areas, investment and appropriate staffing of shared resources is even more crucial. As agencies struggle to recruit new individuals to serve in a law enforcement capacity, MSP is also assisting agencies like Hallowell and shouldering additional burdens created by significant vacancies that County agencies are also unable to address under existing resources.

Every law enforcement agency in the state needs additional staffing to meet the 21st century policing needs and their significant interdependence upon each other is very visible currently. It's important to consider this interdependency when making decisions that impact state agencies, particularly when the impact is felt widely including in communities with no organized police department and those with adequately staffed agencies. MSP provides services that are not able to be provided in many communities, and many of these services are highly technical and benefit from consistent training and experience that comes from their wide geographic mandate. While all communities share these resources, the nature of the change in threats that law enforcement must answer means these services are increasingly drawn upon to address high risk volatile situations.

For these reasons municipal officials urge you to support all efforts to protect and preserve the capacity to respond to emergencies, and provide increased investigative support services in all communities, including those without an organized police agency available, and assist the increased burden experienced by the entire law enforcement system in our most rural and under resourced counties.

Public Safety Training. Training for all first responders has been structurally established to be entirely dependent on the deep cultural affinity Mainers have for the principle of service to others and volunteerism. This over-reliance on volunteers is increasingly hard to balance for agencies that are short staffed. As training mandates have increased without additional support for their provision, even small local recruitment issues make it challenging for agencies to share staff to provide the Maine Criminal Justice Academy with a cadre for 18 weeks without significant overtime and salary expense. The increased stipend for cadres proposed in the 0290 Criminal Justice Academy line is therefore welcomed but officials hope that adequate resources will be dedicated to the facility that allow staff to engage in ways that training can be expanded and delivered to reduce barriers training may present for the recruitment of mature candidates, or primary care givers and single parent candidates.

Fire training is an additional area where increased demand is outstripping the modestly resources services provided by the Maine Fire Service Institute. New training mandates that are influenced by Federal decision-making programs and the need for the fund created under the Regional Fire Service Training Fund. Continued support for this program is vital, and it is also increasingly necessary to provide support for regional training facilities that can meet environmental protection standards while also providing realistic experiences for individuals who desire to serve their communities.

Adequate resources are also necessary to support in our EMS certification system. In many communities, EMT training programs are held at times and locations that make it challenging to train individuals who have other full-time jobs but could otherwise serve in a part-time capacity. This is particularly challenging in rural areas of Maine where barriers the recruiting barriers are not finding willing individuals locally but rather accessing certification programs often held in the middle of the day and over an hour away.

County Jail Operations Fund. Public safety threats to our communities are increasingly drug related, violent, and linked to other social deficits that lack resources to be addressed adequately and consistently state-wide. County jails are increasingly being relied upon to manage individuals requiring specialized care, such as mental health or substance use treatment, despite lacking the necessary resources or community support systems. These challenges are not unique to any single facility but are shared across the state.

The protection of victims, and the community writ large remains a priority, but these facilities are burdened by forces beyond the control of local funds to address or respond. Recognizing that county jails interact with multiple state systems and that the state has a role to play in the housing of individuals before and after conviction, historically the state has contributed no less than 20% of the cost of those operations to be distributed by a formula based in statute until the 130th legislature.

The County Corrections Professional Standards Council, established by the 130th Legislature in 2022, was tasked with addressing critical challenges facing county jail operations. The council's creation aimed to tackle systemic issues requiring substantial statewide investment in social and justice processes—issues that no single facility, or property taxpayer, could manage alone. Despite continued recommendations by the Council supported with data in support of increased funding necessary to address impacts that include judicial, prosecutorial, public defender pressures and mental and behavioral health services.

Over the past two biennium budgets, the State, through the DOC budget, has allocated a stagnant \$20,342,104 annually for jail operations. This funding accounts for less than 17% of the total cumulative jail budget of nearly leaving counties to shoulder the overwhelming majority of costs that they cannot mitigate locally or control. While the Governor's proposed budget for FY26 and FY27 includes an additional \$4,000,000 for the Operations Fund targeted to medically assisted treatment, this modest increase will still fall short of raising the State's share to even 20% and does not cover the statewide total cost of these programs that were mandated by the 130th Legislature. The funding gap highlights the urgent need for a more equitable and sustainable approach to support the critical functions of county jails statewide.

While we appreciate the continued commitment expressed by the Administration through the Department of Corrections to support the provision of MAT in county facilities, the appropriation is not adequate to address the inflationary costs for the services county facilities provide for the state beyond their original remit. There are two known bills that the CJPS Committee will be asked to consider that are seeking to provide an equitable path forward and adequately support pressures beyond DOC control such as judicial system barriers, sentencing

practices and a lack of adequate resources dedicated to holding mentally ill individuals who belong in a hospital setting.

Officials ask that the committee consider the appropriation recommendation for County Jail Operations Fund in Part A as the bare minimum that should be considered but instead consider appropriation approaches that will be introduced legislatively this year as well. The property taxpayers are shouldering too much of the burden for increased pressures beyond the capacity for local funds to address, influence or control. Officials fear that continuing to rely on property taxes to fund these pressures without adequate state skin in the system for the pressures entirely under your control will allow the problems to remain hidden from public understanding and spur only responses to symptoms, over solutions. Focusing on problems instead of symptoms and honoring the state and local partnership through adequate appropriation is in the best interests of the residents, communities, and most importantly, victims.

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LD 210
Public Safety and Corrections