



Maine County Commissioners Association

4 Gabriel Drive, Suite 2 Augusta, ME 04330, 207-623-4697
www.mainecounties.org

LD 461, An Act to Fund Rural Patrol Services in Washington County

February 24, 2025

Chair Beebe-Center, Chair Hasenfus, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Dave Marshall, and I serve as County Commissioner in Penobscot County. I am testifying today on behalf of the Maine County Commissioners Association. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee in support of LD 461, but with the caveat that our Association supports funding for additional state police patrol services to meet the coverage needs of all rural counties in Maine.

About MCCA. Briefly, the Maine County Commissioners Association was established in 1890 to assist Maine's county government in providing vital services to Maine citizens in a responsive, efficient, and credible manner. The Association is based in Augusta, represents all 16 of Maine's counties, and is governed by a board with representation from each participating county.

What does LD 461 do? LD 461 would provide funding for four Maine State Trooper positions to conduct rural patrol in Washington County. If passed, this bill would expand state police coverage in Washington County.

Discussion. The Maine State Police are required by State law to provide patrol of the State's highways with an emphasis on rural parts of the State. 25 M.R.S. §1502. Rural police patrol is a crucial public safety service for our State. Despite its importance and for a variety of reasons, the Maine State Police have had to reduce the number of state troopers assigned to rural patrol. The reduction in state support for rural patrol is the result of a variety of causes, including: a shift in forces over time by the State Police in support of important specialty services like computer crimes, tactical teams, bomb squads, and the state crime lab; an overall decline in sworn officer positions going back several decades; and in recent years, a rise in vacancies due in part to COVID and workforce shortages. As a consequence of the reduction in state support for rural patrol, there has been a decline in needed law enforcement services in rural parts of the state resulting in longer call response times and an overall reduction in needed law enforcement. These deficiencies directly impact the residents of rural Maine. The deficiencies could be made up in part by increases in county sheriff patrols, which has happened over time, but the cost of such services ultimately falls to Maine's already overburdened local property taxpayers. That is why our Association strongly supports efforts to help restore state police coverage of our rural counties. Such restoration of services helps keep rural Maine safer, but without further burdening Maine property taxpayers.

Last year, the Maine State Police proposed adding 32 new state police positions to help alleviate the shortfall, and 16 of those recommended positions were ultimately funded. Our Association supported the addition of these positions. According to the State Police, these new positions were important to improving the quality of existing state police coverage in Maine and would help reduce reliance on overtime, but the State Police cautioned that these new positions would not result in any expansion of rural patrol coverage assigned to particular counties. To address these individual county coverage needs, counties were advised by the Administration that they would need to request new legislation seeking funding for additional state troopers to expand state police coverage within their specific counties. LD 461 is one such bill, and in this case, the bill would provide additional state police coverages in Washington County.

MCCA Testimony re LD 461

February 24, 2025

Page 2

to provide needed rural patrol services in Washington County. However, in supporting this bill, our support is conditioned on Maine providing similar support to meet the patrol needs of all of Maine's rural counties. To the extent that such goal must be accomplished by amending this bill, or by combining this bill with another bill, we would support such steps.

Conclusion. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill and express our support for LD 461 -- along with efforts to provide additional state police support for all of Maine's rural counties. Thank you, and please let us know if you have questions or need additional information.

Respectfully submitted,

David S. Marshall

Dave S. Marshall
Commissioner, Penobscot Committee

cc: Commissioner Andre Cushing, President, MCCA
James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP, MCCA Legislative Counsel