



Maine County Commissioners Association

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

LD 477, An Act to Enhance Public Safety in Rural Counties by Providing State Police Patrol and Policing Services

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 477.

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 of Maine's 16 counties, and is governed by a board with representation from each participating county.

What does LD 477 do? LD 477 would provide 15 State Trooper positions and 9 State Police Corporal positions to enhance public safety in rural areas of the state. Four corporals and four troopers would patrol the Northern Field Troop area, which includes Piscataquis, Penobscot, Hancock, and Washington Counties. The remaining corporals and troopers would patrol Aroostook, Somerset, Franklin, and Androscoggin Counties.

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 477 is one such bill, and in this case, the bill would provide additional state police coverages in Maine's rural counties.

As noted above, we support the goal of this bill and would welcome the assignment of additional state troopers to provide needed rural patrol services in rural Maine. However, in supporting this bill, our support presumes that such support is fairly apportioned among Maine's rural counties and is best designed to meet the needs of such counties. To the extent any further modifications of the bill are needed to accomplish this goal, we would be supportive.

Conclusion. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill and express our support for LD 477 and its funding for state police in 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 County

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