

Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Support For

LD 679 – An Act to Increase the Funding to the Live Fire Service Training Facilities Fund

March 3, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am testifying in support for LD 679, at the direction of MMA's Legislative Policy Committee (LPC). Our LPC is made up of individuals from across Maine with municipal officials elected by their peers across Maine's 35 Senate districts representing communities with very different access to available enforcement resources and local capacity.

This fall, the Maine Municipal Association (MMA) held regional conversations with municipal officials and candidates from across the state. While the specific needs of each region varied, one common theme emerged everywhere: the urgent need for consistent and increased funding to support public safety, particularly through training. The current approach to training, however, is creating significant challenges. It undermines efforts to recruit new personnel to serve their communities and worsens disparities in resources, leaving rural Maine further behind when it comes to shared facilities.

A recurring concern voiced during these conversations was the difficulty of traveling long distances for training, the scheduling of training sessions at inconvenient times for volunteer staff, and the limited training options available.

LD 679 presents an opportunity for the state to strengthen its partnership with public safety agencies by investing in live fire training facilities. These facilities would improve shared resources across communities while being built to standards that protect both firefighters and the environment. By mitigating the harmful byproducts often encountered in live fire training, they would also allow responders to experience real-life stressors in a safe, controlled setting.

With recent environmental rule changes to the acceptable levels of ground contamination of polyfluoroalkyl, substances known commonly as PFAS and PFOA, live fire training through the historic method creates toxic waste that potentially contaminates ground water and soils. While this substance is ubiquitous and prevalent in many of the items we use on a daily basis, elimination from water and ground sources is an enormous challenge and costing governments and individuals thousands of dollars.

Live fire training sites are extremely important, not only in preparing municipal fire volunteers for the realities of a structure fire, but also for environmental protection, and the safety of fire fighters.

Currently, the community college system relies on training facilities funded and maintained by other localities. It's essential for the state to take a more active role in supporting and maintaining these facilities, ensuring a more effective partnership in public safety. LD 679 may be a small step, but it's an important one that signals the state's commitment to supporting the safety of both residents and visitors. As Maine continues to benefit from tourism, the burden of funding public safety largely falls on local residents who serve in these vital roles.

For these reasons, we urge you to consider investing General Fund revenue in public safety, and specifically in LD 679.