

Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Opposition to

LD 726 – An Act to Protect Municipalities' Investment in Law Enforcement Officers

March 10, 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 submitting testimony in opposition to LD 726, 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.

It is the difference in capacity between communities across Maine that forms the biggest reason for the opposition to the approach in LD 726 as drafted. Currently, the cost for moving a certified officer between communities is based on a predictable and controllable model allowing free movement of officers between agencies from Presque Isle to York. This is important not only from the perspective of allowing an individual agency to serve where they want, but also the municipality who may need their services.

The percentage increase proposed by the bill, coupled with new language for "training costs" can—and likely will—be interpreted as all of the costs to send an individual to training including geographically different salary ranges, back filling overtime, locally adopted incentives such as hiring bonuses, insurance programs, and travel to and from Vassalboro. For this reason alone, officials are concerned about the introduction of additional language that might disrupt the even applicability for certified officers in one area of the state, resulting in costing more to recruit than another area. This would create an intra-state pool of more attractive recruits to agencies from despite the wide need of officers. Many smaller rural and northern agencies are on the verge of closing their doors and this would further limit the pool of individuals who might be interested in applying, simply because they could not be afforded by the agency seeking to hire them.

As MMA testified under LD 723, recruiting Maine residents is already a barrier because of the differences between evaluating out of state candidates and hurdles for Maine candidates to commit to a residential model even as mature or recently retired federal officers. Agencies are currently hiring more lateral officers or out-of-state officers than fresh cadets because of the inflexible hurdles currently in place. Border communities with long standing partnerships with federal border patrol agents who live and back up their policing efforts are not considered to have comparable credentials, thus following retirement they must go to the 18-week academy to serve in the communities where they may have lived for decades.

One municipality found this out after consulting with the MCJA board assured of the waiver program and hiring the individual only to have the waiver declined because the federal academies have

never been comparable and there is no bridge program to assist adding to their existing credentials. Attending an 18 week residential academy as a new cadet is not an attractive option for a mature retired federal law enforcement officer.

The lack of curriculum investment to create bridge programs or new models of police education remain a barrier and is far from “speculative”, with real community examples of communities challenged by the lack of resources provided to growing responsive future models of law enforcement education.

Unless this bill is amended to remove the language for “training costs” it could further disadvantage Maine residents from deciding where to take their career in the state. All agencies benefit from this flexibility, even when it is infuriating, however, this bill would further make out of state applicants and waived credentials more appealing. All agencies need more options and candidates, not limits on candidates or costs to hire existing.

Officials ask that you consider the language of this bill to limit possible costs to their current predictable pattern of instruction alone and possibly explore how increased training reimbursements might provide an additional avenue for MCJA to have greater flexibility for expanding curriculum for non-residential programming and innovative law enforcement learning.