



Maine County Commissioners Association

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April 28, 2025

Sen. Beebe-Center, Chair
Rep. Hasenfus, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: ***Testimony of MCCA regarding LD 1600, An Act to Provide Regional Support Funding for Municipal Police Departments to Support Special Response Teams***

Chair Beebe-Center, Chair Hasenfus, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

On behalf of the Maine County Commissioners Association, we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to this Committee ***in opposition to*** LD 1600. MCCA opposes LD 1600 because it imposes additional unfunded costs on county governments, which would ultimately be passed on to residents through property taxes. As property taxes are a regressive form of taxation, they disproportionately burden low-income individuals and families.

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 1600 do? LD 1600 establishes the Special Response Team Fund within the Department of Public Safety to provide annual reimbursements to municipalities that maintain and operate special response teams. The bill requires that 10% of the total cost of the fund be assessed to county governments annually, based on the proportion of each county's state valuation. Counties would be responsible for raising these funds through existing property tax mechanisms.

Discussion. This bill proposes the creation of the Special Response Team Fund to reimburse municipalities that maintain and operate special response teams, such as SWAT units. While the intent to support specialized law enforcement capabilities is understandable, the bill lacks a clear funding mechanism, effectively making it an unfunded mandate. This places additional financial strain on county governments, which are already operating with limited resources.

Moreover, LD 1600 would result in a form of double taxation for residents. Taxpayers would be contributing at both the municipal level, through local taxes funding these special response teams, and at the county level, through property taxes. This is particularly concerning for rural counties, where residents may rarely, if ever, benefit from the services of urban-based special response teams. It is

inequitable for communities like Dexter to subsidize specialized units primarily serving larger cities such as Portland.

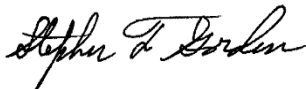
MCCA believes that any initiative to support municipal special response teams should be accompanied by a comprehensive funding plan that does not disproportionately impact county resources or rural taxpayers. We urge the Committee to consider the financial implications of LD 1600 and to seek solutions that ensure equitable support for all communities.

Unfunded mandates. Under Maine's constitution, when state laws or rules impose costs on a unit of government, the state is responsible for 90% of the costs unless otherwise approved by both houses of the Maine Legislature with a 2/3 vote. Currently most if not all of the requirements placed on county government were not approved by the required 2/3 vote of each house of the Legislature – recognizing that some of the requirements may be a function of constitutional requirements or standards adopted prior to the addition of the mandate clause to the Maine Constitution. The financial impact of LD 1600 would be felt by local property taxpayers throughout the state who are primarily responsible for funding county government operations. On their behalf, MCCA would strongly oppose such a change in law. Counties are already under-resourced and overly reliant on local property taxpayers.

As a final note, the Maine State Police currently maintain special response forces that are made available to local units of government, if needed. These services are effective, and funded through the State's General Fund. With this in mind, establishing a separate funding stream for municipal response teams is burdensome and unneeded.

Conclusion. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in strong opposition to this bill. If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Respectfully submitted,



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Co-Chair, Legislative Policy Committee, MCCA



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Co-Chair, Legislative Policy Committee, MCCA

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

