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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Opposition to

LD 1600 – An Act to Provide Regional Support Funding for Municipal Police Departments to Support Special Response Teams

April 28, 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 neither for nor against, LD 1600, 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.

Municipal law enforcement agencies already have an established path to sharing municipal resources through a memorandum of understanding and several teams in southern Maine share both costs and staffing of their created interlocal agreement teams. This bill would not only upend those resource sharing agreements but also force other municipalities whether they have a law enforcement agency or not, to pay for the operational decisions of a single municipal agencies that may not have jurisdiction or authority to respond to their special response needs.

County taxes are not separate but equal tax, it is a bill based on state valuation of real estate in the county and sent to municipalities which must be paid. The communities who pay the largest portion have the greatest property value but likely also have their own law enforcement agency receiving correctional services but not law enforcement services except through cooperative circumstances. This bill removes the democratic voice of property tax holders to influence budget discretion of local law enforcement and forces everyone to pay for an increased assessment based through a county bill for the operational decision of a single municipal agency in a community they have not voted to create and have no voice in creating. The recent headlines around agency enforcement decisions highlight the need to protect the input of local residents to shaping enforcement priorities.

If a municipal agency creates a special response team, it should support, train and accept the risk of that decision in their own budgets and with interlocal agreements negotiated with other willing communities.

Moreover, the bill would require a municipality with a special response team to pay additional amounts to the county on top of their assessed tax in order to be reimbursed for their operational expense and as determined by the Department of Public Safety, on top of their county assessment. The Department of Public Safety provides special response teams for all the communities regardless of their local agency status currently, with no need for a contract or assessment. Instead, they need adequate staffing to address the broad-based needs for the reality of rural law enforcement and those needs for the remaining 300 municipalities without a law enforcement agency. As you have heard repeatedly in the committee, those

position counts are desperately needed because of the growing complex policing needs of rural and urban communities and an operational reality staffed at 1990's levels.

For all of these reasons, the Association asks you to oppose LD 1600 and adequately staff the state level agency that is, and should be, tasked with the responsibility to use all in tax revenue and deliver this vital important and highly skilled response team approach statewide. Local communities have a shared responsibility for community safety and well being through their policing agency. It's vital that shared responsibility in this case does not become an adjacent community burden without voice and via county assessment decided by a state agency for the same reasons the committee has already heard under the county corrections model.