



Department of the Secretary of State Bureau of Motor Vehicles

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

L.D. 429, "An Act to Reclassify Certain Offenses under the Motor Vehicle Laws and Increase the Efficiency of the Criminal Justice System"

Testimony Provided by Shenna Bellows Secretary of State

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Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Shenna Bellows and I am the Secretary of State and chief motor vehicle officer. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of L.D. 429, "An Act to Reclassify Certain Offenses under the Motor Vehicle Laws and Increase the Efficiency of the Criminal Justice System."

I would like to address Part A of this bill which amends Title 29-A. The Bureau takes no position regarding Part B which addresses provisions in Title 17-A, which the Bureau has no jurisdiction over.

A version of this bill was presented during the 129th Legislature before its abrupt end to the Second Regular Session. At that time, Representative Charlotte Warren, the then-sponsor, graciously met with representatives from the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to address concerns we had with the original version. We appreciated the version presented then which largely reflected that earlier work.

We thank the sponsor and the Maine Prosecutors Association for working with us to draft the amendment presented to you today. The amendment does not change the ultimate goal of decriminalizing low-level offenses but does explicitly lay out in statute that the more serious suspensions and revocations – those resulting in death, bodily injury, or assault, for example – remain Class E crimes.

To note, we do support this bill's intent to take several low-level offenses under Title 29-A and convert the penalty from a Class E crime to a traffic infraction with fines adopted by the Chief Judge of the District Court. We believe this is a reasonable compromise ensuring motor vehicle laws are upheld while alleviating the life-altering collateral consequences a criminal record carries. Additionally, we know this bill does not completely remove a prosecutor's ability to charge an individual under certain provisions as there are other mechanisms of enforcement in other provisions of law. Implementation of these changes will not pose a significant burden to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions or get additional information to the Committee ahead of the work session. Thank you for your time.