



Auburn Police Department

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Testimony of Chief Jason Moen in support of LD 673, An Act to Direct the Maine Criminal Justice Academy to Develop a Nonresidential Law Enforcement Training Program

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Jason Moen, I am Chief of the Auburn Police Department. I have served the City of Auburn for the past twenty-seven years, five as Chief of Police.

I appear before you here today to offer my testimony in support of LD 673, An Act to Direct the Maine Criminal Justice Academy to Develop a Nonresidential Law Enforcement Training Program. The State of Maine is grappling with an unprecedented law enforcement recruitment crisis, to which I have not seen the likes of in my twenty-seven years in law enforcement. The face of Maine Law Enforcement is changing rapidly in an attempt to keep pace with societal changes. In order to help overcome the recruitment crisis, I believe it is time to change our training model.

Currently the Basic Law Enforcement Training Program (BLETP) is an eighteen-week residential program covering 720 hours of training curriculum. I believe that the residential aspect of the program serves as a barrier for some prospective candidates for a myriad of reasons to include; Single parents who may not have a support system to care for their children while they are attending the academy, Parents of special needs children who simply cannot be absent from their children for five days a week for eighteen weeks, the younger generation who feel that being away from their support systems may result in feelings of isolation which may encourage them to quit the training program.

The residential training program model is a model that is diminishing across the country. Fifty percent of training academies across the country are non-residential programs. Even our own Maine State Police has seen the value of transitioning to a non-residential training program. They are currently evaluating a non-residential training program on a group of certified officers that have been hired by the State Police and are currently in training.

One could argue that the rural nature of our state requires a residential model for logistical issues. I understand that some members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee are concerned that transitioning to a non-residential training model could necessitate additional staffing positions for the Criminal Justice Academy. Last year I spearheaded an effort with a group of Chiefs from Southern Maine to look at various ways to help reduce the backlog of candidates waiting to attend the Basic Law Enforcement Training Program. A backlog was exacerbated by the COVID Pandemic as

well as a change in BLETP selection criteria which prioritized attendance by date of hire and not allowing agencies to reserve training slots based upon need.

The group worked with Matthew Tifft, Chairperson of the Public Service and Social Sciences Department at Central Maine Community College. Together we crafted a proposal for a non-residential Basic Law Enforcement Training Program to be held at Central Maine Community College in Auburn. The program would have been conducted with volunteer instructors from various law enforcement agencies as the Academy BLETP does and Portland Police Department was willing to provide a training officer to serve as the Program Coordinator, managing the day-to-day operations of the program and serving as a liaison with the Criminal Justice Academy to ensure training standards were being met, requiring no additional Criminal Justice Academy staff to facilitate the program. Central Maine Community College President Betsy Libby saw so much value to this prospective program, she offered a substantial discount on classroom space, office space and food. This led to a cost of \$1,400 per cadet for the training program, which is approximately half the tuition cost of the BLETP.

This past November I presented this non-residential training proposal to the Maine Criminal Justice Academy Board of Trustees. I outlined the proposal, highlighting the fact that no additional academy staff would be necessary to oversee the non-residential training program. The Board of Trustees proceeded to table the proposal citing administrative challenges and instructor availability. The Board also indicated that there was no longer a need for an alternative training program as the backlog of cadets waiting to attend the BLETP had greatly diminished. The Board of Trustees did recognize that this proposal could be revisited should another backlog occur.

As a Team Leader for the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, I have traveled the country for the last fifteen years conducting dozens of law enforcement accreditation assessments on law enforcement agencies. I have seen this non-residential training model be very successful in other parts of the country especially in the south where police academies are run by the community colleges in conjunction with training standards and curriculum that are established by the state's training agency or training oversight board.

It bears mentioning that when a certified officer from out of state applies for Maine Law Enforcement Certification, a curriculum analysis is conducted by Criminal Justice Academy staff to ensure that the officer's training is comparable with Maine training. It bears no weight whether that officer attended a residential or non-residential training program, but whether the curriculum and training hours are sufficient to meet Maine training standards.

I sincerely believe that transitioning to a non-residential training program for full-time law enforcement officers is one way to help alleviate the recruitment crisis currently happening in Maine Law Enforcement and I would urge you to vote in favor of LD 673. Thank you for your time here this morning.