



Commissioner Andre E Cushing III

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March 13, 2023- Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

LD 756 “An Act To Provide Funding for positions in Penobscot County”

And

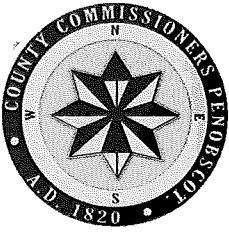
LD 799 “An Act to Provide Funding for the Penobscot County Sheriff’s Office”

To the Honorable Committee Chairs Senator Beebe-Senter and Representative Salisbury and the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter presented today. This pertains to a significant need in our communities z related to an area core to your committee’s mission, public safety.

I am referring to the long-standing agreement between law enforcement agencies to provide coverage and respond to calls for aid from citizens in our counties. Particularly in rural areas of counties where no municipal police departments exist and where unfortunately more examples of serious crimes are manifesting themselves. An example of a sustained and successful partnership has been operating in Penobscot County for over 20 years. I refer to the practice of call sharing, where certain sectors of the county were cover on a shift by county patrol deputies and on alternating shifts by the locally station Maine State Troopers. This allowed for a sharing of personnel, resources and it reduced the expenses to both agencies for service. AS important, it built a good and effective relationship between these agencies, fostering better understanding, more effective presence and goodwill.

For reasons never shared with our county sheriff the mission of the Maine State Police has changed and with it, the terms of this valuable call sharing program. Penobscot County was provided an ultimatum last spring; the state police would be reducing their cooperation in rural patrol coverage by **one third** in a new contract of a one-year term. If the sheriff did not sign this contract the implication was the state police would feel free to end any rural call sharing. After numerous discussions with state police leadership the deadline arrived and to mitigate the cost to Penobscot County in both finances and proper public safety coverage, we saw no alternative but to sign the new contract. This occurred well after that year’s county budget had been approved and we were faced with finding resources to add patrol deputy positions in order to sustain the level of coverage provided to the communities and citizens of Penobscot County.

We come before your committee to respectfully ask one something simple, don’t require our citizens to pay twice for the same services they have previously received. The county has only one means to acquire revenue to fund our patrol operations, the property taxes acquired from towns. The state which has greater means than a county does to acquire and disburse necessary revenue, should give due consideration to the hardship inflicted on rural residents when they already pay a portion of taxes for services to then see our state agencies reduce by a significant factor this vital service. Should these same taxpayers be assessed an additional charge through their property taxes for a policy decisions for which they had no input?



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Penobscot County as you have heard in prior testimony has some unique features as they relate to public safety. Here are two which really highlight our need for more positions to address the mission.

We are the 3rd most populous county, (152,765)

We have the 3rd most road mile, (2,372)

With 55 towns and cities, and 11 parcels of unorganized territories that have only 11 communities with municipal police departments (20% of Penobscot communities, compared to Cumberland and York which have an average of 50% of their communities with municipal departments)

I thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request and ask that you send this bill forward to the full legislature for review and action with the strong support of this committee charged with decision making on the important questions relating to public safety.