



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I'm Representative Steve Foster, representing the towns of Stetson, Exeter, Charleston, Dexter, Garland, and part of Bradford. I'm here today to testify on behalf of LD756- "An Act to Provide Funding for Positions in the Penobscot County Sherriff's Office". My testimony would also apply to LD799- "An Act to Provide funding for the Penobscot County Sheriff's Office".

As you've heard from the bill sponsors, these bills are born out of the unique geography and population of Penobscot County. We have the third largest population of any county, but our citizens are spread over a very large geographical area, which provides challenges for rural public safety needs.

In addition to representing six rural towns in Penobscot County, I also sit on the County budget committee. I've had a unique vantage point to see this situation unfold. I can tell you that we are working on a budget solution to fix this problem long-term, but as the change took place in the middle of a budget cycle, the funding in this bill is essential now, to get us by while we work it out in future budgets.

One additional consideration for this bill that might interest some folks is the impact on tourism that the rural patrol has in this part of the state. At one end of Penobscot County we have Dexter, where I live, which is the gateway to the Moosehead Lake Region. I know, because I used to follow about 300 snowmobile trailers home after work on Friday afternoons or boats and campers in the summer. To the north, we also have Baxter State Park just outside of Millinocket. These are two of the largest draws for our out-of-state visitors each year, which creates increasing pressure on our Sheriff's deputies as the population ticks up during these busy times of year, when those folks depend on rural patrols as much as we do.

Thank you for the time today and for your thoughtful approach to this issue. I hope that we can find a solution and take care of this funding for Penobscot County.

Respectfully,
Steven Foster
Dexter