



## Testimony of the Maine State Law Enforcement Association

In Support of

LD 2094 Resolve, to Require the Establishment of a Stakeholder Group to Examine and Improve the Recruitment, Retention and Wellness of Law Enforcement Officers

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Joel Wilkinson, and I am speaking in strong support of LD 2094 on behalf of the members of the Maine Fraternal Order of Police. The Maine FOP currently represents state, county, and municipal law enforcement officers from York County to Fort Kent. We are also a proud member of the Maine Law Enforcement Coalition. I come to you today with 28 years of personal experience in county, municipal, and state law enforcement in various roles and disciplines.

Maine's officers are charged with protecting our public safety, and their well-being needs to be better supported. The tragedies, unspeakable acts, and exposure to the most extreme scenarios any human will ever see have residual effects on our officers' well-being. Add low staffing numbers, mandated shifts, and low entrance wages, and we have the recruitment, retention, and wellness crisis we are in today.

It is no secret that law enforcement agencies throughout Maine are suffering from an unprecedented number of vacancies. These vacancies come at a time when agencies are seeing increased call volume, and officers are being mandated to perform more duties than ever before. The need to find a sustainable solution to the statewide issues of recruitment and retention is urgent.

Right now, to maintain coverage and protect the people of Maine, some agencies are forced to mandate overtime to cover vacancies, which results in officer fatigue and burnout. You cannot manage Maine's law enforcement vacancies with mandatory overtime, it is unsustainable. Forced overtime and unpredictable schedules are not appealing to younger generations wanting a good work-life balance. These agencies need to staff their vacancies and take the pressure off the current ranks because increased vacancies combined with increased call volume results in increased response time. This is not good for the public, nor is it good for the officers trying to meet the demands of the profession. Officers suffer from the constant pressure of being understaffed, leading to mental fatigue. In a profession where decisions must be made in a split second, it is not advantageous to have burned-out officers on patrol.

During the fall of 2022, the Maine Law Enforcement Coalition commissioned a Critical Insights poll. The survey results showed that ninety-two percent (92%) of voters in Maine believe the state's shortage of law enforcement officers should be a priority for lawmakers.<sup>1</sup> This indicates overall broad public support of Maine's law enforcement community and shows that Maine people know law enforcement is a major factor in keeping their communities safe.

We ask for your help in establishing this stakeholder group to examine and improve the recruitment, retention, and wellness of law enforcement officers in Maine. I hope this group can make viable recommendations to meet this challenge we are facing. Something must be done before more officers leave the profession and even fewer step up to pursue a career in law enforcement. This resolve is an effort to produce potential solutions and recommendations to the crisis that is before us and provide employers, managers, and officers with a road map to improve the future of Maine's law enforcement officers and the safety of our communities.

Thank you for your time, and I am available to answer any questions you may have at this time.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://wgme.com/news/local/poll-claims-84-of-mainers-have-a-positive-view-of-law-enforcement-critical-insights-on-maine-tracking-survey-digital-research-inc-maine-law-enforcement-coalition-police>