



Maine Sheriffs' Association

"One Team, One Mission"

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January 29, 2024

LD 2109 - An Act to Maintain State Police Rural Patrol Services at 2020 Staffing Levels

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Ken Mason. I am the Sheriff of Kennebec County and Chair of the Maine Sheriffs' Association's Legislative Policy Committee. LD 2109 - An Act to Maintain State Police Rural Patrol Services at 2020 Staffing Levels is a bill the Maine Sheriffs are neither for nor against.

This bill is well-intentioned, and Maine Sheriffs applaud the efforts of Senator Timberlake of Androscoggin County. There are many sheriffs' offices in Maine that are struggling to meet the needs of their rural constituents, but we do not believe that L.D. 2109 is the best path to take to alleviate the added coverage that fell to Maine Sheriffs with the reorganization of the Maine State Police.

When Sheriff Nichols presented information about rural patrol in Franklin County, he noted that his county alone is bigger than the entire state of Rhode Island. He went on to say that some nights, he has two deputies working to cover patrol in his county. "It takes 2 ½ hours to get from one end of Franklin County to the other.", illustrating the basic challenges of rural patrol coverage in just one county. Maine can and must do better to ensure all Maine citizens have access to public safety, and we need sustainable funding to provide those services, consistently, to all areas in the State.

Funding rural patrol is not a new concern facing this committee or even this Legislature. We've been talking about this growing problem for years, even before the year identified in L.D. 2109, 2020. The MSP call sharing agreements were created, in some cases, decades ago. Law enforcement has changed dramatically, and the needs of our constituents have changed. Restoring coverage to a time when we already had difficulties providing coverage isn't the answer. We need to evaluate the needs of our rural communities and establish a sustainable resource that does not deplete resources needed by our law enforcement partners.

Again, many thanks to Senator Timberlake for his efforts and while we don't agree with the path created in this bill, we appreciate the opportunity to keep this discussion moving forward. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Ken Mason, Chair
MSA Legislative Policy Committee