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LD 2109, An Act to Maintain State Police Patrol Services at 2020 Staffing Levels
Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
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Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Criminal Justice and Public Safety; my name is Senator Jeff Timberlake and I represent Senate District 17, which includes the towns of Greene, Leeds, Lisbon, Livermore, Livermore Falls, Sabattus, Turner and Wales in Androscoggin County and Fayette and Litchfield in Kennebec County. I am here to present LD 2109, “An Act to Maintain State Police Rural Patrol Services at 2020 Staffing Levels.”

For decades, Maine’s law enforcement agencies had a symbiotic relationship that provided patrol coverage in every area of the state. This relationship was necessary and borne out of the fact that we’re rural. We’re spread out across 35,000 square miles. The balanced approach of State, County and Local law enforcement agencies created a harmony that provided rural patrol and community policing from all levels of law enforcement.

Late last year, I had a meeting with Maine State Police leaders – specifically Colonel Ross – to really get a handle on what was going on. My goal was to see what challenges the State Police were facing that were forcing them to scale back these patrols. Much like what we’re seeing in both public and private employers across the state, the lack of recruitment and retention has been the major driver that has led to dozens of open positions in the Maine State Police.

There are many reasons for this. The pandemic paused our Criminal Justice Academy. Retirements have affected not only our State Police but also County and Local departments as well. Specialization of services has moved personnel to certain disciplines. And quite frankly, it’s my understanding that we haven’t increased our investment in our State Police rural patrol funding for decades or kept pace with other agencies in the State and even that of other states.

Meanwhile, crime in all classes and levels has increased, particularly in the past few years due to our drug and fentanyl epidemic. Criminals are seizing on the fact that patrol coverage has decreased; and we’ve been broadcasting that fact to them for years.

This is not a State Police problem. I don’t view this as a Republican or Democratic issue either – the reason I’m here is my own county of Androscoggin is faced with having to add one or two new deputies just to

replace the coverage of State Police rural patrol. This amounts to double taxation because of the need to increase county taxes to cover the same services provided by State Police. We're seeing other counties across Maine – from Penobscot and Washington to York County – facing the same issues.

I'm not married to any particular proposal; and I'm open to any idea. But I believe in my heart that we need to reestablish the harmony between all levels of law enforcement to what existed in 2020 before the pandemic. What it is about is when someone dials 911 in Jackman, Lovell, Columbia, Dixmont or any other rural town in Maine, we need to be confident there is someone on duty to respond to that call in a timely manner.

It's time for Maine State Police to go back and do the job that has created the balance we've enjoyed as a state for decades. But it's also time for us to give them the resources to do so.

Thank you for the time. I'd be happy to take any questions.