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132nd Legislature
Senate of
Maine
Senate District 6

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LD 461 - An Act to Fund Rural Patrol Services in Washington County

Good morning, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. I'm here to introduce LD461 - *An Act to Fund Rural Patrol Services in Washington County*.

My name is Marianne Moore. I proudly represent Senate District 6 which includes all of Washington County and 16 Communities in Eastern Hancock County as well.

This bill provides funding for four (4) Maine State Trooper positions and related "All Other" Costs to conduct rural patrols in Washington County.

As a point of reference, Washington County (WC) covers 3,258 square miles with a population of 31,379 as of the 2020 census. Travel from one end of WC to the other could take up to 5 hours. For years the Maine State Police (MSP) provided rural call sharing in support of the WC Sheriff's Department (WCSD). The initial call sharing percentage was 50% of the shifts. Coverage between the two entities was a coordinated effort to assure proper public safety for the citizens of WC across the County. Several years ago, claiming a reduction of personnel on the part of the MSP, the call sharing percentage was reduced to 1/3 of the shifts. The WCSD was forced to add additional deputies to cover the necessary shifts, again to ensure proper public safety. In the spring of 2023, the WCSD was notified the MSP would no longer be providing rural call sharing and would instead develop a Resource Coordination Agreement which was reluctantly signed by the WC Sheriff on May 25, 2023 with an effective date of July 9, 2023. While the agreement agreed to provide specialized law enforcement services and provide proactive traffic enforcement with an emphasis on Route 9, Route 1, along with high crash

areas, the removal of the call sharing has placed a major strain on the current staffing levels of the WCSD to cover shifts. Statistically, prior to the agreement, the WCSD handled 5,488 incidents between June 30, 2022 and July 1, 2023. After the agreement, the WCSD handled 9,411 between July 2, 2023 and June 30, 2024 – an increase of 3,923 incidents or 42% overall increase. As incidents continue to rise (6,445 from July 1, 2024 to present), the costs of maintaining the WCSD coverage such as fleet upkeep, etc. (i.e. miles traveled in 2013 – 356,332 vs. 2024's – 643,670) continue to increase, resulting in increased costs to the citizens of WC.

As the Legislative Representative on the WC Budget Committee, we were presented with the 2024 budget from the WCSD with a request for two (2) additional deputies to attempt to cover the required shifts vacated by the discontinuance of the rural call sharing by the MSP. The estimated cost to the County, passed down to the Municipalities, was close to \$390,000 including the initial startup costs.

With only three (3) municipal Police Departments in the County, who are also experiencing workforce shortages, the task of coverage has become quite critical! Citizens often must wait hours for a deputy's response to a 911 call.

Over the past year the WC Delegation, in concert with the WCSD, the WC County Commissioners and the Regional State Police leadership, has encouraged the State Police's expansion of their rural patrol coverage specifically for Washington County. This bill is the culmination of our conversations.

In view of the importance of this issue, I am asking for your support of this important bill!

Thank you!