



**MAINE MUNICIPAL
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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Support For

LD 298 – An Act to Employ Mental Health Personnel Within the Maine State Police

March 10, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am testifying in support for LD 298 at the direction of MMA's Legislative Policy Committee (LPC). Our LPC is made up of individuals from across Maine with municipal officials elected by their peers across Maine's 35 Senate districts representing communities with very different access to available enforcement resources and local capacity.

This fall, MMA along with command staff from Maine State Police and County partners in some locations conducted listening sessions and facilitated discussions with candidates for state office and municipal officials and staff to understand unique local challenges and discuss public safety more broadly together. In Aroostook County, where police agencies are shuttering their doors at an alarming rate, we heard the need not only for greater support for the system of law enforcement response but also the desperate need for mental and behavioral health services. One police chief shared the demoralizing routine faced by his officers as they responded to individuals in crisis more than 300 times with no ability to refer them to non-existing services, or capacity to grow those resources locally.

Where Behavioral Health Coordinators have been deployed through the Department of Public Safety, they have brought deep knowledge of available resources, state systems that are not always clear to local government and provided diversion and connections to find a way through the complex maze of possible providers, impossible for those in crisis to find. During these discussions in several counties including Hancock and Washington County, we learned that there is one individual making significant strides in these areas for the MSP troop that serves the area and that more are not only needed but required should service be provided in a more consistent way as a resource for all agencies.

For these reasons, officials ask that you expand the behavior health coordinator program and ensure that the resource is available to all agencies in the area particularly because there is no ability to grow or expand such a program through local funds. The positions outlined in LD 298 could make a difference for all agencies and connect individuals to help breaking the cycle where the only alternative is the County jail.