



STATE OF MAINE
Department of Public Safety
Maine State Police
42 State House Station
45 Commerce Dr., Suite 1
Augusta, Maine
04333-0020

Janet T. Mills
GOVERNOR
Michael Sauschuck
COMMISSIONER

COL. William G. Ross
CHIEF
LT. COL. Brian P. Scott
DEPUTY CHIEF

Testimony of Major Lucas Hare

**Neither For nor Against LD 298
An Act to Employ Mental Health Personnel Within the Maine State Police**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am Lucas Hare, The Operations Major of the Maine State Police, and I am here today to testify on behalf of the Department neither for nor against LD 298.

The Maine State Police requested and received five behavioral health coordinator positions in Governor Mill's supplemental budget in April of 2022 pursuant to Maine Public Law 2022 Chapter 635. These were new positions that had been requested by Commissioner of the Department Public Safety Commissioner Michael Sauschuck, and the Maine State Police Command staff so troopers could better respond and serve those people suffering from mental and behavioral health problems and substance use disorder. Members of the legislature, advocates, policy makers and social service agencies were consistently telling law enforcement that when dealing with people suffering from mental health issues, substance use disorder, homelessness, and other behavioral health related issues we should use diversion not enforcement as the preferred tactic. Leadership at the department of public safety and the Maine State Police agreed with this approach as the preferred method of dealing with these calls and wanted to ensure that people and their affected families received the support they needed. With that goal in mind the department requested these new positions to better facilitate and coordinate referrals to community-based resources and social services agencies based on a call for service that necessitated a police response. The positions were intended to help divert people to services and away from the criminal justice system when appropriate. They would work collaboratively with various partners and stakeholders to help identify persons who have solicited or compelled a police response related to mental health, substance use disorder, co-occurring disorders, homelessness, elder abuse, domestic violence, or any type of situation where there may be services available to aid the person(s). The coordinator will then make recommendations regarding a plan, or a strategy aimed at improving their circumstances. They will make referrals to help coordinate community-based resources who may be able to intervene and assist. The main goal of these positions was to get

people the help they need by providing them with a consistent level of service. It is the hope that in doing so there will be a reduction in repeated law enforcement responses to the same residence that is not necessarily law enforcement related. This helps create efficiencies for a police force that is already dealing with capacity issues and allows them to better focus on their primary mission. Additionally, it ensures that referrals are done consistently and thoroughly when you have a core group of individuals who by virtue of their training, education and experience are familiar with the services and processes behind them.

The behavioral health coordinator program has been an overwhelming success. Last year the coordinators responded to over 1200 calls for service statewide. These calls range from assisting those with opiate addictions to acting as liaisons with medical professionals and the State Police when implementing extreme risk protection orders. These positions are a force multiplier and here are a few examples.

Helping an elderly couple in their 90s who were living on their own but were unable to fully care for themselves. Behavioral Health Coordinators were able to work with Veterans Affairs through their connections at Togus and get the couple the care they needed.

Behavioral Health Coordinators have been able to coordinate resources along the I95 and I295 corridors assisting those experiencing homelessness. Coordinators spent hundreds of hours making sure that mental health, substance abuse and housing assistance was provided when possible.

Behavioral Health Coordinators worked with Deputies and Troopers in the town of Wayne to ensure the safe implementation of a yellow flag order. Residents had been reporting the steady decline of one of their neighbors and their concerns about his use of firearms. Behavioral Health Coordinators worked with Troopers and medical providers to document the issues which ultimately led to Troopers implementing the yellow flag law. When the man was detained at a local store he was armed with a handgun and a rifle. Fortunately he was taken into custody without incident and received treatment.

I could continue with examples of the outstanding work our Behavioral Health Coordinators have done but I will sum up my testimony by saying that they are an invaluable resource to the communities they serve and have become a critical part of our agency. For reference I have attached the 2023 Behavioral Health Coordinator Annual Report for your review.

I would like to thank Representative Underwood for his support of the Behavioral Health Coordinator program and answer any questions you may have.

Major Lucas Hare
Maine State Police Operations

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Offices located at: 36 Hospital Street, Augusta Maine
(207) 624-8939 (Voice) (888) 524-7900 (TDD) (207) 624-7088 (Fax)