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MAINE SERVICE CENTERS COALITION

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Testimony of the Maine Service Centers Coalition
LD 723, An Act Requiring the Maine Criminal Justice Academy to Develop a
Nonresidential Basic Law Enforcement Training Program

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, the Maine Service Centers Coalition is submitting testimony in support of LD 723, An Act Requiring the Maine Criminal Justice Academy to Develop a Nonresidential Basic Law Enforcement Training Program.

The Maine Service Centers Coalition, comprised of 26 towns and cities across the state, articulates the importance of healthy and thriving service center communities, advocates for public policy that supports and contributes to the economic and social viability of our communities, and collaborates with municipal officials, legislators, state agencies and nonprofits to pursue quality of life for all who live and work in our state.

Our Coalition supports the Board of Trustees of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy establishing a nonresidential Basic Law Enforcement Training Program that mirrors the residential program now offered. Before beginning full duty as a law enforcement officer in Maine, people are required to complete the Academy's residential training program. The Academy's 18-week program is held twice a year and typically accepts 70 people at each session.

Like law enforcement agencies throughout Maine, many police departments in our service center communities are understaffed and continually searching for qualified candidates to fill the vacancies. When candidates are found and hired, they must wait several months for one of the Academy's limited spaces to open up before they begin their training. Waiting to get them qualified and into the field costs our communities time and money, often for overtime wages needed to cover open shifts.

The residency requirement has been mentioned as a deterrent by potential candidates who live here in Maine or have considered moving to our state to pursue careers in law enforcement. We have also heard from those with family obligations that it is difficult to be away from home for 18 weeks.

Should LD 723 pass, the Board of Trustees' rigorous curriculum, training standards and certified instructors, for which the Academy is recognized, could be offered in nonresidential settings across the state. Instituting such a program would remove some of the barriers experienced by our communities and police departments. Long wait times between hiring candidates and getting them to work protecting our citizens would be reduced, and our police departments would be more fully staffed. Some of us would see costs savings, and our pool of candidates could open up.

We respectfully urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 723. Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.