

Region 5 of the Maine Chiefs of Police Association

Representing Police Chiefs in the Counties of Penobscot and Piscataquis

March 14, 2025

TESTIMONY OF CHIEF MARK LEONARD REGION 5 OF THE MAINE CHIEFS OF POLICE ASSOCIATION

LD 592 - An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Crime of Endangering the Welfare of a Child.

Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Mark Leonard, and I am the Chief of Police for the Veazie Police Department. I am also the past President of both the Maine Chiefs of Police Association and the New England Association of Chiefs of Police, and currently represent Region 5, which encompasses the Police Chiefs of Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties. I am here today to offer my testimony in strong support of LD 592 – An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Crime of Endangering the Welfare of a Child.

Region 5's Police Chiefs join the Maine Chiefs of Police Association, the Maine Sheriffs Association, and other partners in supporting this important legislation. As law enforcement professionals, we are committed to upholding public safety, advancing the standards of policing, and protecting those who are most vulnerable in our communities—especially our children.

Across Maine, we are witnessing an alarming increase in cases where children suffer harm or even death as a result of a caregiver's reckless disregard for their safety. Tragically, children are being exposed to dangerous drugs like fentanyl, left in hazardous environments, or present during violent criminal acts, such as drug transactions. These disturbing incidents are becoming all too common, and we must act to prevent further harm.

LD 592 seeks to address these issues by clarifying the mental state required for child endangerment offenses and by enhancing the penalties for those whose reckless actions lead to serious injury or death. Under the current law, the Class D crime of endangering the welfare of a child is defined too broadly. This amendment would clearly attach a recklessness standard to the violation of a caregiver's duty and introduce more severe penalties when a child's injury results in serious bodily harm (Class C) or death (Class B). By doing so, this bill ensures that law enforcement has clearer guidelines to respond to these critical cases and hold offenders accountable to a higher standard.

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This proposed change is not meant to target parents or caregivers who are struggling to care for their children, but rather to hold accountable those adults who knowingly put children in harm's way. As law enforcement officers, we have seen firsthand the devastating impact of trauma and exposure to criminal behavior on children. Adverse childhood experiences can have lifelong consequences on a child's health, well-being, and opportunities for the future. We cannot afford to ignore the ongoing cycle of harm that is devastating too many of our youngest and most vulnerable residents.

Region 5 of the Maine Chiefs of Police Association strongly supports LD 592 because it strengthens our ability to protect Maine's children and ensures that those who cause harm are held accountable. It is critical that we take decisive action to safeguard the future of our communities by protecting the most defenseless among us. Because of this we respectfully urge you to vote *Ought to Pass* on LD 592.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer questions today or during the work session.