

TESTIMONY OF DIRECTOR RICHARD R. DESJARDINS
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY
MAINE CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACADEMY

(In Opposition) L.D. 513

"An Act to Modify the Composition of the Board of Trustees of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy"

Sponsored by: Rep. Reckett

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Hearing Date: April 16, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 436, State House

Rep. Reckett, Sen Deschambault, Rep. Warren and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is Richard R. Desjardins and I am the Director of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy, representing the Maine Department of Public Safety.

I am here today to testify In Opposition to LD 513, "An Act to Modify the Composition of the Board of Trustees of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy. However, I want to express my support for sections of this bill that increase the size of the Complaint Review Committee from 3 to 5 members. Adding additional committee members from our current Board will strengthen this committee and help in their work in reviewing and making recommendations regarding waivers and complaints against law enforcement and correction officers.

The Maine Criminal Justice Academy's Board of Trustees has been in existence since the early 1970's, with a major change to the Board's make-up in 1995, when 3 additional citizen members were added, and in 2019, the addition of a member of Wabanaki tribal governments. We believe the Academy has a well-rounded Board made up of 18 members that sets the training and certification standards for all law enforcement and corrections officers in the State of Maine.

Currently, the MCJA Board has the following representatives: the DPS Commissioner, the DOC Commissioner, the Attorney General, the State Police Colonel and the Maine Warden Colonel, who are all ex-officio members. We have 13 members who serve a 2 or 3-year term and are appointed by the Governor. They are, a Maine Sheriff, a Maine Police Chief, a Federal Law Enforcement Officer, a District Attorney, a Non-supervisory Corrections Officer, a member of Wabanaki tribal governments and two (2) Police Officers. We also have three (3) Citizen Board members, an Educator, a Municipal Official, none of whom could have ever been a sworn law enforcement officer. These five (5) are truly "citizen" members of the Board.

This 18-person Board is very active and meets every other month in-person and in public. In addition, we have five (5) working subcommittees of the Board that meet on the opposite months or as needed. The Complaint review Committee is arguably the busiest of the committees and has the responsibility of reviewing waiver applications and analyzing complaints against law enforcement and correction officers and making recommendations to the full Board of certification decisions.

Adding additional members to the committee will help spread the responsibilities and increase the number of Board members that would be able to sit on this important committee.

Regarding the proposed additional member to the Board, the Department of Public Safety feels adding the additional member would further increase from the optimal number of 7-9 members to an even larger board, making the important work potentially more difficult to be supported by the current Academy staff.

We also feel that the Board already has an excellent representation of the law enforcement and corrections community, as well as citizen members. By opening the membership to a special interest group such as County Commissioners, additional requests for adding more special interests' groups will follow.

Our current Board members frequently hear from constituents that have questions, concerns or ideas for our Academy and we feel, like other Maine citizens, the County Commissioners have an opportunity to reach out to any of our Board members, myself or attend our public meetings if they have topics they would like our Board to address.

In closing, the members of the Board of Trustees are tireless advocates, working very well together on the important topics that face the law enforcement and correction's profession. The Governor has the ultimate authority to select the members of our Board and I believe this selection process has given our Board and this State outstanding representative of Maine's citizens. This Board's recent moves to strengthen the standards and training of law enforcement continues to be far ahead of other states and reflects the interest of our Board to be responsive to the concerns around law enforcement accountability.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have, either now or at any future work session.