

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

(In Opposition) L.D. 1447

"An Act to Require Training in Racial Issues, Racial Justice and Social Issues at the Maine Criminal Justice Academy and To Establish Additional Requirements for Law Enforcement Officers and Candidates"

Sponsored by: Rep. Gramlich

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Hearing Date: May 7, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 436, State House

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 1447, "An Act to Require Training in Racial Issues, Racial Justice and Social Issues at the Maine Criminal Justice Academy and To Establish Additional Requirements for Law Enforcement Officers and Candidates".

I first want to say the Academy's Board is fully supportive of the training topics mentioned in the bill and the Maine Criminal Justice Academy's Board has included these topics, along with a wide range of additional training topics in our basic school as well as the yearly mandatory trainings for all law enforcement officers. Topics related to bias, community policing, mental health, addiction recognition, and homelessness are but a few of the important topics that our Board requires to be included in our training.

The concerns we have with this proposed bill is the prerequisites for training and educational requirements placing burdens on agencies, communities, applicants, and our Academy's staff to meet these additional requirements. It's evident across the country and in Maine of the shortage of qualified applicants able to enter the profession of law enforcement. In addition, we know that bringing candidates from underrepresented minority populations is a significant challenge and without community support leads to minority groups not having the opportunities to become law enforcement officers.

Currently, Maine's requirements to become an applicant to attend our Basic Law Enforcement Training Program (BLETP) is very rigorous and we believe helps deliver applicants to our profession who demonstrates evidence of integrity, honesty, discipline and physical/ psychological aptitudes to do the work. The current Board standards require, Alert testing, psychological, polygraph and fitness testing as well as thorough background checks. The past conduct and history of applicants must meet the high standards of the Academy's Board and frequently we hear from agencies that it's very difficult to get applicants to pass the current standards.

We believe by adding the educational requirements and additional training requirement would further stress the process to become a law enforcement officer.

Our current 39th BLETP Academy class of cadets have a variety of ages, gender, educational, ethnic, and demographic backgrounds. Although, we don't specifically track all potential categories, we know from our interactions with these cadets that some wouldn't meet the proposed criteria. I know from my own personal experience in the law enforcement profession, that many successful and talented officers didn't start their careers with academic degrees. Many of these officers had trade skills or life experiences that proved vital and made these individuals immensely important members of the agencies and communities they serve.

In closing, the members of the Board of Trustees, volunteer instructors and the Academy's staff are tireless advocates, working to improve the quality of the professionals that represent law enforcement in Maine. We believe in a constant improvement process of our programs and hope to continue to work with our partners to train the best officers Maine has to offer

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