

Meaghan Dunn
Kittery

January 9, 2022

Senator Dechambault, Representative Warren, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Meaghan Dunn, and I am a 12 year resident of Kittery, the town where I am raising my family. I am writing in support of 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."

We entrust our police officers with the responsibility of responding to difficult situations that occur in public places and private locations in our communities. The range of situations police officers have been charged with responding to has grown greatly. Officers are frequently called to situations that require expertise in mental health, trauma intervention and substance abuse disorder. We also give them the authority to use deadly force and drastically alter the trajectory of peoples' lives. Given the wide scope of situations we ask police to deal with and react to, high quality and intensive training that provides officers with the tools and knowledge to more effectively and safely interact with the public is in the best interest of the community and the officers themselves.

As a public school teacher, I am expected to spend years studying how to best meet the needs of my diverse student populations. The training and professional development of public school educators does not end with initial certification. We are required to continue to grow in our profession and better understand how we can effectively reach students with varied backgrounds and neurological makeup. The preparation and continual training required of police officers is equally, if not more, important given the tremendous authority and power of this branch of public servants.

In addition to training on social issues, an awareness of racial justice and racial issues is also critical for police officers. Discrepancies based on race in regards to incarceration rates and the frequency and nature of police interaction are well documented; Maine is not exempt from this unjust reality. In 2016, our former governor who is running again for reelection, made international headlines with his racist comments about policing people of color. When speaking about Maine's effort to combat drug crime, Paul LePage said that "the enemy right now... are people of color or people of Hispanic origin". He added that, "When you go to war... and the enemy dresses in red and you dress in blue, then you shoot at red." With this explicit and unabashedly violent racism being given a platform by our state's highest leader, it is imperative that our policy makers pass legislation to protect Mainers from becoming targets of violence and injustice.

We all have biases, and those of us who interact with the public in positions of power have a duty to recognize and address them as they can cause immense harm. This education is not a process that can be done individually or voluntarily. In order to be effective, it must be universally mandated and regularly revisited. Requiring police officers to gain greater awareness and knowledge in regards to racial and social issues will better prepare them to deal effectively and safely with the diverse public that they serve. By passing this legislation and providing training in racial justice, racial and social issues, you will be demonstrating your care and concern for both police officers and for all those they are entrusted to protect and serve.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my testimony. I urge you to pass LD #1447.

Regards,
Meaghan Dunn
Kittery, Maine