



Maine Municipal
Association

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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

Neither For Nor Against

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

May 7, 2021

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am testifying neither for nor against to LD 1447 as directed by MMA's 70-member Legislative Policy Committee.

Municipal officials support hiring well trained, high functioning individuals for roles as municipal police. Currently, most police departments incentivize participation in higher education courses through increased pay bonuses for degree holders to payment of classes usually based on the in-state tuition rate at Maine's Universities and subject to received grades.

These classes are hard to pursue when overtime is often required due to staffing shortages and shift work, which is the nature of the career.

Officials believe it is important to review all proposed reform measures based on a firm knowledge of the entire law enforcement landscape in Maine, the differing approaches to enforcement based on agency and community priorities, the constituents they serve, outcome and evidence-based approaches to improvement, and better links between our local state and federal partners.

To decide where we are going, we need to know where we are.

Municipal officials are concerned that this bill offers an overly prescriptive solution without being tied to a known deficiency or defined outcome. While cadets receive implicit and racial bias training through their existing Maine Criminal Justice Academy requirements, officials also know that there is an increased call for additional training due to the national narrative.

However, the limited list of Associate degrees defined in this bill under 25 MRSA §2803-A, sub-§1 Sec. C. makes uninformed assumptions that only those defined disciplines are applicable to police work. Nothing could be farther from the truth. At the core of all law enforcement activities is understanding humans and critical thinking. Broad-based humanities disciplines and technical degrees are of equal value to police when they interact with citizens.

Police have educational backgrounds in many disciplines that intersect with their duties from leadership and marine resources to history, or business. Some pursue education in other areas stemming from experiences on the job. Excluding individuals due to their degree choice is not a step forward and risks sidelining exceptional individuals from Maine's diverse communities.

Rather than placing barriers to recruiting candidates who desire to serve their communities, the legislature could support a robust review of the current system with an eye towards meeting recruits where they are and shaping them into the types of officers we desire them to be.

No other career requires individuals to spend 12-18 weeks away from their families to work in a civilian public service role. Should training and education be improved? Undoubtedly, yes. This is where we should also invest in linking with education.

The current model of academy delivered training is highly reliant on dedicated volunteer instructors who are paid by their sending agencies to provide these services to all law enforcement. It is a model that has suited Maine well in the absence of appropriate funding and staffing a police college approach. The additional training that is mandated through legislation is often shifted to outside providers, unfunded, and could certainly be delivered in more meaningful ways. This requires an evaluation of Maine law enforcement job requirements and desires, a comprehensive view of the current system, and investment in change or improving delivery.

To that end, municipal officials ask that you consider creating a stakeholder review process out of this bill and understand the current training delivery system. This will allow all levels of government to make informed decisions about where the investment in change will carry the greatest weight, support identified needs for improvement, and find opportunities for linking with our public university partners.