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January 7, 2022

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

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," which I understand it going to work session with your committee.

I am an attorney and a resident of Kittery, Maine. I was an Assistant District Attorney in Suffolk County and Norfolk County, Massachusetts before moving to Maine 20 years ago. I now focus much of my practice on issues involving children. I advocate for the educational rights of children with disabilities and I represent parents fighting to enforce those educational rights. I am regularly appointed by the court to serve as a guardian ad litem in child protection cases. Personally, I am committed to antiracism and I am now a member of the Kittery Town Council.

LD#1447 is a well thought out effort to address important needs within our communities. Over the past forty years, funding and support for social safety nets has either decreased or has not kept pace with increased costs of living. As a result, police officers are expected to do much more than simply investigate crimes. They are often the first ones called for mental health crises and other events that should not require a law enforcement response. At the same time, funding has increased for the militarization of police forces. All of this has created higher expectations and more and more stress for police officers. With this important responsibility, police officers need more than a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Systemic racism is a fact of life. The underinvestment in social institutions and overinvestment in policing disproportionately impact people of color and people with disabilities. It is only through educating ourselves and recognizing our own implicit biases that we can begin to recognize and dismantle the systems of white supremacy that plague our country. Police need the additional education and training in order to meet the needs of all Mainers.

I encourage you to support this important legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/. Mary Gibbons Stevens

Mary Gibbons Stevens