

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

Ought Not to Pass - LD 756

**An Act to Provide Funding for Positions in the Penobscot County Sheriff's Office**

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY

March 13, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety, greetings. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am the Policy Counsel at the ACLU of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil rights and civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, we urge you to oppose LD 756 because it would expand a fundamentally flawed arm of state government.

If enacted, this bill would establish an ongoing, annual appropriation of \$500,000 to fund five new patrol positions in the Penobscot County Sheriff's office. This new expense, and these new positions, are entirely unnecessary. Our state expenditures must reflect our values. Over the past few years, it has become inescapably clear that we have relied on the policing institutions in our country to solve challenges better suited to our healthcare, housing, and educational systems. The results have been disastrous for everyone, but especially for nonwhite Mainers, poor Mainers, and Mainers with disabilities. Our constitutional values of freedom from unreasonable state intrusions, of liberty and dignity, are not advanced by the criminalization of poverty or mental health challenges. Adding new patrol positions to the Penobscot County Sheriff's office would be a continuation of failed systems.<sup>1</sup> Given the opportunities that we have to invest in housing and health care, choosing instead to fund new patrol positions is a missed opportunity.

We urge you to vote *ought not to pass*.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Callie Ferguson and Erin Rhoda, *Penobscot County Jail guards sexually harassed their co-workers and kept their jobs*, Apr. 1, 2019, BDN, available at <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2019/04/01/mainefocus/penobscot-county-jail-guards-sexually-harassed-their-coworkers-and-kept-their-jobs/>.