April 20, 2023

Senator Pinny H. Beebe-Center, Chair
Representative Suzanne Salisbury, Chair
Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety
State House, Room 436
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: **L.D. 1247, Resolve, to Study Training in Racial Issues, Racial Justice and Social Issues at the Maine Criminal Justice Academy and Study Additional Requirements for Law Enforcement Officers and Candidates**

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Mary Bonauto and I am the Senior Director of Civil Rights at GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD), a litigation and policy organization addressing issues affecting the LGBTQ people across communities in New England and nationally. Together with EqualityMaine, MaineTransNet, and OUT Maine, we support this important Resolve.

Police and law enforcement are part of our communities. In addition to law enforcement work on roads and highways and responding to concerns about crime, police and law enforcement are on our streets, in many schools, and are often the first to respond to a person in mental health crisis, to conduct a welfare check, and to address complaints, including about trespassing, noise, unhoused people, and people struggling with behavioral health issues.

Given the extent of contact between law enforcement and communities (including through community policing practices), those engagements are more likely to be safe and productive when police share some deeper understanding of the communities they serve. To that end, the Academy has brought in NAMI Maine, for example, to teach about people with developmental disabilities, including those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, which for some may sometimes involve behaviors concerning to others and which trigger a call to law enforcement.

LD 1247 asks for a rigorous study of how our State trains its law enforcement officers with respect to credentialing of board and staff, the curriculum and the challenges of reliance of volunteers to provide education and training, analysis of the differences between policing in rural and urban areas, and any necessary adjustments, recruiting strategies to bring diverse communities into law enforcement, and to "compile recommendations for improving the training of law enforcement officers through community and education partnerships, including by addressing statewide recruitment needs, racial justice and social issues, mental health and substance use disorder issues, and an identified needs for additional requirements for law enforcement officers and candidates." LD 1247, sec. 6 (7).

This Resolve takes a holistic view of Academy curriculum, training and resources with the goal of seeking analysis and recommendations to strengthen this foundational part of law enforcement. That is something that should appeal broadly. Both law enforcement and communities will benefit from this effort.

With respect to racial justice and racial and social issues, these, too, are and should be treated as a core aspect of police training. As is true for any person, more information about the communities and experiences of people's lives, especially when they are experienced as different from us or are a community with which we have had little experience, changes the quality of interactions and reduces misunderstandings. As we all know, when misunderstanding results from assumptions about people or their behavior because of race, or mental health issues, the stakes are high, and may be a matter of life and death. While this is more than enough reason for the Resolve to pass, as the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering & Medicine explained in a recent report, Reducing Racial Inequality in Crime and Justice: Science, Practice and Policy (2022), there are also stark facts which compel interrogation, analysis, and action in Maine and nationally. As the Report asserted on its first page:

> A vast body of research has documented large racial disparities at each state of the criminal justice process. Black Americans, Hispanics, and Native American have all been found to experience relatively high rates of arrest, pretrial detention, incarceration, and community supervision compared to White Americans." [1]

This Resolve is a chance to allow the Academy to better fulfill its training and other functions and to examine and engage in recommenations for addressing racial disparities at each stage of the criminal justice process. Please vote ought to pass on this bill.

Sincerely,
Mary Bonauto, Sr. Director Civil Rights GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders

On behalf of GLAD
EqualityMaine
MaineTransNet
OUT Maine

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[1]   National Academies Press, *Reducing Racial Inequality in Crime and Justice: Science, Practice and Policy* (2022), at 1-1, available for download at http://nap.nationalacademies.org/26705 Chapter 8 of the same Report addresses reforms to reduce racial inequities.