

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

Ought Not to Pass - LD 630

An Act to Ensure Rural Law Enforcement Services in Maine

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CRIMINAL JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY

May 9, 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 630 because it would expand a fundamentally flawed arm of state government.

If enacted, this bill would fund new law enforcement services in rural Maine. This new expense, and these new positions, are entirely unnecessary, and we urge you to think about more effective places to invest limited state resources. Our state expenditures must reflect our values. Over the past few years, it has become increasingly clear that we have relied on the policing institutions in our state to solve challenges better suited to our healthcare, housing, and educational systems. Throughout Maine, a tiny fraction of 9-1-1 calls result in an arrest, and an even smaller fraction of that result in a use of force. In Westbrook, only 0.43% of 9-1-1 calls in 2019 resulted in a use of force.¹ In Portland, officers used force in only 0.13% of 9-1-1 calls in 2019.² 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. Indeed, by neglecting human services and instead investing in policing,

¹ Westbrook, Maine, Police Department, *Westbrook Police Department Use of Force Analysis* Dec. 21, 2020, at 22, https://www.westbrookmaine.com/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_12212020-653

² Portland Police Department, *Post Protest Discussion Of Ppd Policies, Procedures & Training*, City of Portland HHS/Public Safety Subcommittee June 9, 2020, at 13, <https://civicclerk.blob.core.windows.net/stream/PORTLANDME/d4e288192b.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=F0%2FAgBhnOXJYwoo7ndB33fZog%2F2r4hICPAKewAkqLUI%3D&st=2021-02-22T15%3A15%3A53Z&se=2022-02-22T15%3A20%3A53Z&sp=r>

Maine and other states have turned law enforcement into de-facto social workers, healthcare workers, and investigators of minor traffic problems.³ 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*.

³ Jeff Asher and Ben Horwitz, *How Do the Police Actually Spend Their Time?*, Nov. 8, 2021, NYTimes, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/19/upshot/unrest-police-time-violent-crime.html>