

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

LD 1586 - Ought to Pass

**An Act To Strengthen Statewide Mental Health Peer Support,  
Crisis Intervention Mobile Response and Crisis Stabilization Unit  
Services and To Allow E-9-1-1 To Dispatch Using the Crisis System**

Submitted to the

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

May 3, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, good morning. 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 support LD 1586 because it would help Maine take strides away from relying on our criminal legal system to solve healthcare and economic challenges.

The most recent eruption of protests across the U.S. and in our own state have laid bare a sobering fact: we have relied on the policing institutions in our country to solve challenges better suited to our healthcare, housing, and educational systems. We were moved to ask: what do prisons and police actually do? We discovered that a staggering share of what passes for police work might be better accomplished by other sorts of professionals or services. Throughout Maine, less than 5% of 9-1-1 calls result in an arrest, and less than half of one percent of 9-1-1 calls result in a use of force. In Westbrook, only 0.43% of 9-1-1 calls in 2019 resulted in a use of force.<sup>1</sup> In Portland, Maine's metropolis, officers used force in only 0.13% of 9-1-1 calls in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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](https://www.westbrookmaine.com/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_12212020-653)

<sup>2</sup> 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>

To my knowledge, the numbers are similar for every other Maine municipality that conducted a workload analysis last year. Given that police officers are the only officials who can legally use force, the fact that only a fraction of a fraction of 9-1-1 calls require a use of force should spur us to rethink our policing systems and where we invest our resources.

We know from our incarcerated population that mental and behavioral health challenges are a leading culprit for incarceration. According to perhaps the most rigorous study about juvenile justice ever conducted in Maine, well over half of incarcerated youth have a recent history of mental or behavioral illness.<sup>3</sup> 69% of youth committed to Long Creek as of late 2019 received behavioral health services through MaineCare the year before they were committed.<sup>4</sup> 71% of that group received the most intensive form of behavioral health services.<sup>5</sup> For too many Maine children, the juvenile justice system has become the default provider of behavioral and mental health services. To remedy this problem, the Juvenile Justice System Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force recommended strengthening the continuum of community health programs. Our adult corrections system is similar: well over half of the people in our jails and prisons face significant mental health challenges or substance use disorders. We have turned to policing and prisons to solve problems better suited to our housing and public health systems.

If passed, this bill would allocate \$4,401,303 to strengthen sectors of our public healthcare systems. This new allocation would increase funding for peer support, crisis lines, crisis intervention mobile response and crisis stabilization services. It would also fund mobile response services, including necessary travel and telephone conferences between councilors and their clients. To ensure that the public knows about these services, the bill would also fund a public education campaign about the availability of mental health peer support, crisis lines, crisis intervention mobile response and crisis stabilization unit services. Finally, this bill would create a framework whereby the E-9-1-1 system can dispatch using the crisis system in response to a mental health emergency. These changes are ambitious but overdue. They will save lives. We urge you to vote *ought to pass*.

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<sup>3</sup> Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment & Reinvestment Task Force Report at 9, available at <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/de726780/files/uploaded/Maine%20Juvenile%20Justice%20System%20Assessment%20FINAL%20REPORT%202-25-20.pdf>, see generally Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment & Reinvestment Task Force, Website, available at [www.mainejjtaskforce.org/about](http://www.mainejjtaskforce.org/about). The taskforce was created by the 129<sup>th</sup> Legislature's LD 1108, which is available at <http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP0812&item=1&snum=129>.

<sup>4</sup> Task Force Report at 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 107.