



Maine Sheriffs' Association

"One Team, One Mission"

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March 1, 2021

L.D. 467 – An Act To Support E-9-1-1 Dispatchers and Corrections Officers Diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Todd Brackett. I am the Sheriff of Lincoln County and an Officer of the Maine Sheriffs' Association. Maine sheriffs met to discuss this bill and our position on L.D. 467 is to support.

Maine Sheriffs oversee the operations and management of the State's fifteen county and regional jails. Prior to the pandemic, our jails housed an average of 1700 inmates per day. While numbers were reduced to mitigate the spread of Covid-19, some jails are experiencing increased numbers of residents and some overcrowding.

Corrections officers can and should be acknowledged as the unsung heroes of county incarceration. Supervising inmates is just one facet of their responsibilities. These professionals may also be responsible for searching for contraband, inspecting facilities, tracking and reporting on inmate conduct, transporting inmates to court or other correctional facilities, preventing disturbances, assaults, and escapes, and many other challenging duties.

These critical staff members are often paid wages that do not accurately reflect their level of responsibility. For example, it was reported that a county jail in southern Maine was advertising to fill C.O. vacancies but was competing with a national big box chain store that hired beginning employees for more than the jail budgeted for new corrections officers. It's a very difficult job to fill and maintain.

In 2018, an inmate incarcerated in a Maine county jail gouged out his own eyes. Several inmates have attempted suicides while staying in our jails and between the years of 2014-2019, eleven such attempts were sadly successful. Feces being smeared on their cells or bodies, substances abusers struggling with withdrawal, families torn apart by crimes and abuse, these examples are but a sample of what corrections officers face every single day on the job.

Maine sheriffs recognize the increased stress that these job conditions undoubtedly incur. Being diagnosed by a licensed psychiatrist or psychologist as having post-traumatic stress disorder from work stress that was extraordinary or unusual would be a valid conclusion. We urge members of this committee to support LD 467.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Sheriff Todd Brackett

Treasurer, Maine Sheriffs' Association