

Senator Diamond, Representative Martin and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation. I am Reverend Kate Braestrup, Chaplain to the Maine Warden Service and widow of Trooper James Andrew (“Drew”) Griffith, who died in the line of duty on April 15th, 1996. I write in support of LD 527.

I lost my husband and the father of my four young children twenty five years ago today (4/15). Not a day goes by that we do not think of him and miss his presence in our lives, wishing he could be present for all the family milestones, wishing his grandson Max had had the chance to know him.

Drew and I met and married in Washington, DC. Drew was born in Tennessee; he had visited Maine only because some of my family members lived here. And yet, when he was seeking to join a law enforcement agency, it was to the Maine State Police that he applied. His reasons for choosing the Maine State Police were characteristic; Drew was looking for a progressive, energetic agency with, as he put it, “Zero corruption.” He was not interested in belonging to a law enforcement agency that citizens could not trust.

At the time—the mid-1980s—this was a more difficult standard to meet than it would be today: Contrary to popular belief, American law enforcement in general has only improved by every possible measure over the past few decades, with better equipment, better training and more accountability than ever before. The improvement is driven primarily by the dedication and effort of law enforcement professionals themselves, whose motivation is simple: They wish to serve, and to serve well. Nevertheless, in 1985 as in 2021, Maine’s troopers were known for their competence, compassion and honesty. The Maine State Police was an agency that Drew was proud and deeply grateful to be part of.

Since Drew’s death, I have had many opportunities to view the work of Maine’s troopers from both a personal and a professional perspective. This experience only confirms what I recognized and took comfort from, even on the terrible day that I lost my husband: That Maine's troopers endure the physical, psychological and spiritual risks of their profession because the work they do is meaningful. Each call-for-service, each rescue, each successful investigation, each and every act of competent compassion is driven ultimately by love. Troopers don’t just yearn but work to make Maine and the world a better, more decent and humane place, especially for the vulnerable, the innocent and the marginalized.

My children and I sometimes wonder what their dad would think, were he to come back to life today. Of course, we can easily imagine his delight in the accomplishments of his kids, his pride in the work of his youngest daughter now serving in law enforcement, and his joy at meeting his grandson Max. But he would also be glad and, I know, so deeply satisfied to see that the Maine State Police even-better version of the department he served and loved, and that the honesty, decency, compassion and professionalism he sought and found continue to be the defining qualities of Maine’s troopers.

My husband’s name is among those that would be memorialized if this proposed measure is enacted, and it was my privilege to have been acquainted with several; others, and to have come to know their families. I think all of us would affirm the sentiment inscribed on the National Law Enforcement Officers’ Memorial, that it is not how these men died, but how they lived that makes them heroes. While all of us fervently hope no new names need be added, we still Maine’s troopers, motivated by love, continue to serve. The citizens of Maine can recognize and, in some small way reciprocate and honor that love, by acknowledging the very real risks of such service, and in honoring the fallen, affirm their support for the living.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Kate Braestrup

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In support of LD 537