

STATE OF MAINE
JUDICIAL BRANCH

Judicial Branch Report for 2025 Public Law Chapter 436, “An Act Regarding the First Judicial District and the District Court Locations in the Judicial Divisions of Androscoggin and Western Aroostook”



**Report to the
Joint Standing Committee on
Judiciary
132nd Legislature**

Honorable Brent A. Davis

Chief Judge, Maine District Court

Amy Quinlan, Esq.

State Court Administrator

Administrative Office of the Courts

125 Presumpscot Street

Portland, Maine 04103

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Introduction

This report is submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary pursuant to An Act Regarding the First Judicial District and the District Court Locations in the Judicial Division of Androscoggin and Western Aroostook. P.L. 2025, ch. 436. This report provides “any recommendations for redrawing the geographic boundaries between any of the judicial divisions set forth in Title 4, section 153 of the Maine Revised Statutes.” P.L. 2025, ch. 436, § 6.

A. An Overview of the Judicial Divisions

The Judicial Divisions are named and defined by 4 M.R.S. § 153. Additionally, each division lists the place for holding court in that division. As amended, the divisions are as follows:

- 1. [Repealed]**
- 2. Androscoggin.** Androscoggin consists of all municipalities in Androscoggin County. The District Court for Androscoggin must be held at Lewiston.
- 3. Western Aroostook.** Western Aroostook consists of the municipalities and unorganized territory known as Hamlin Plantation, Cyr Plantation, T17 R3, T17 R4, T16 R5, T15 R6, Winterville Plantation, T15 R8, T15 R9, T14 R10, T14 R11, T14 R12, T14 R13, T14 R14, T14 R15, T14 R16 and all municipalities and unorganized territory in Aroostook County lying to the west and north of these. The District Court for Western Aroostook must be held at Fort Kent.
- 4. Eastern Aroostook.** Eastern Aroostook includes the municipalities and unorganized territory known as Limestone, Caribou, Washburn, Wade, T13 R5, and all municipalities and unorganized territory in Aroostook County lying to the north of these up to the boundary of the division of Western Aroostook. The District Court for Eastern Aroostook shall be held at Caribou.
- 5. Central Aroostook.** Central Aroostook includes the municipalities and unorganized territory known as Blaine, TD R2, T9 R3, T9 R4, T9 R5, Oxbow, T9 R7, T9 R8, T10 R8, T11 R9, T11 R10, T11 R11, T11 R12, T11 R13, T11 R14, T11 R15, T11 R16, T11 R17, and all municipalities and unorganized territory, including the City of Presque Isle in Aroostook County lying to the north of these up to the boundary of the division of Western Aroostook and the boundary of the division of Eastern Aroostook. The District Court for Central Aroostook shall be held at Presque Isle.

6. Southern Aroostook. Southern Aroostook consists of all municipalities and unorganized territory in Aroostook County not included within the divisions of Western Aroostook, Eastern Aroostook and Central Aroostook. The District Court for Southern Aroostook shall be held at Houlton.

7. [Repealed]

8. Southern Cumberland. Southern Cumberland consists of the municipalities of Pownal, North Yarmouth, Yarmouth, Cumberland, Falmouth, Cape Elizabeth, Scarborough, Portland, South Portland, Westbrook, Gorham, Gray, New Gloucester and Windham. The District Court for Southern Cumberland shall be held at Portland.

9. Northern Cumberland. Northern Cumberland consists of all municipalities in the County of Cumberland not included within the divisions of Southern Cumberland and Bath-Brunswick, and consists of the municipalities of Brownfield, Denmark, Hiram, Fryeburg, Lovell, Sweden, Stow and Porter in the County of Oxford. The District Court for Northern Cumberland must be held at Bridgton.

10. Franklin. Franklin consists of the entire County of Franklin. The District Court of Franklin shall be held at Farmington.

11. Hancock. Hancock consists of the entire County of Hancock. The District Court for Hancock must be held at Ellsworth.

12. [Repealed]

13. Northern Kennebec. Northern Kennebec consists of the municipalities of Albion, Belgrade, Mount Vernon, Sidney, Vassalboro, Winslow and all municipalities in Kennebec County lying to the north of these. The District Court for Northern Kennebec shall be held at Waterville.

14. Southern Kennebec. Southern Kennebec consists of all municipalities in Kennebec County not included within the division of Northern Kennebec. The District Court for Southern Kennebec shall be held at Augusta.

15. Knox. Knox consists of the entire County of Knox. The District Court for Knox shall be held at Rockland.

16. Lincoln. Lincoln consists of the entire County of Lincoln. The District Court for Lincoln shall be held at Wiscasset.

17. Northern Oxford. Northern Oxford consists of Gilead, Bethel, Milton Plt., Peru, Canton and all municipalities and unorganized territory in Oxford County lying to the north of these. The District Court for Northern Oxford shall be held at Rumford.

18. Southern Oxford. Southern Oxford consists of all municipalities and unorganized territory in Oxford County not included in the division of Northern Oxford, except the municipalities of Brownfield, Denmark, Hiram, Fryeburg, Lovell, Sweden, Stow and Porter. The District Court for Southern Oxford shall be held at Paris.

19. [Repealed]

19-A. Northern and Central Penobscot. Northern and Central Penobscot consists of the municipalities and unorganized territory of Hopkins Academy Grant Township, Long A Township, Medway, TA R7 WELS, Burlington, Edinburg, Lakeville, Lagrange, Lowell, Passadumkeag, Twombley, Pukakon Township and all municipalities and unorganized territory in Penobscot County lying to the north of these. The District Court for Northern and Central Penobscot must be held at Millinocket and Lincoln. The Chief Judge shall determine the level of service at each location.

20. [Repealed]

21. Southern Penobscot. Southern Penobscot consists of the municipalities of Alton, Glenburn, Hampden, Hermon, Old Town and all municipalities and unorganized territory lying east of these and south of the division of Central Penobscot. The District Court for Southern Penobscot shall be held at Bangor.

22. Western Penobscot. Western Penobscot consists of all municipalities in Penobscot County not included within the divisions of Northern, Central or Southern Penobscot. The District Court for Western Penobscot shall be held at Newport.

23. Piscataquis. Piscataquis consists of the entire County of Piscataquis. The District Court for Piscataquis shall be held at Dover-Foxcroft.

24. Bath-Brunswick. Bath-Brunswick consists of the entire County of Sagadahoc and the municipalities of Brunswick, Freeport and Harpswell in Cumberland County. The District Court for Bath-Brunswick shall be held at Bath, West Bath or Brunswick, the exact site to be determined by the Chief Judge.

25. Somerset. Somerset consists of the entire County of Somerset. The District Court for Somerset shall be held at Skowhegan.

26. Waldo. Waldo consists of the entire County of Waldo. The District Court for Waldo shall be held at Belfast.

27. Northern Washington. Northern Washington consists of the municipalities and unorganized territory known as Charlotte, Cooper, Crawford, Pembroke, Perry, Eastport, T26 E.D., T36 M.D., T37 M.D. and all municipalities and unorganized territory in Washington County lying to the north of these. The District Court for Northern Washington shall be held at Calais.

28. Southern Washington. Southern Washington consists of all municipalities and unorganized territory in the County of Washington not included within the division of Northern Washington. The District Court for Southern Washington shall be held at Machias.

29. York. York consists of the entire County of York. The District Court for York must be held at Biddeford or in any other court facility in the division.

B. Background of Judicial Divisions

In 2025, the Western Aroostook division was amended to remove Madawaska as a location for holding court, accommodating the closure of the Madawaska District Court. P.L. 2025, ch. 436. Additionally, the Androscoggin division was updated to list only Lewiston as the place for holding District Court. *Id.*

The Madawaska District Court closed on November 1, 2025, pursuant to an order of District Court Chief Judge Brent Davis. See press release (Aug. 22, 2025) <https://www.courts.maine.gov/news/article.html?id=13256657>. The Order of August 22, 2025, designated a new District Court assignment for each town which had previously been assigned to the Madawaska District Court.

The order listed the municipalities or unorganized territories reallocated from Madawaska and assigned to Fort Kent District Court, consistent with the legislative change, for the following:

- Madawaska,
- St. David,
- Grand Isle, and
- Lille.

The order listed the municipalities or unorganized territories reallocated from Madawaska to the Caribou District Court, inconsistent with the legislative change but closer in distance, for the following:

- Keegan (T17 R3),
- Van Buren,
- Hamlin Plantation, and
- Cyr Plantation.

The order clearly designated the District Court location for residents of all affected towns and set forth other details for the Madawaska District Court closure, effective November 1, 2025.

Prior changes to the divisions include various updates needed when courts close or change locations. In 2021, the Southern York division and the Western York division were repealed, as the new location of the District Court in Biddeford consolidated the other District Courts in York County and accommodated closure of the District Court locations in Biddeford and York. P.L. 2021, ch. 633, §§ 2, 3.

Effective in 2023, the Southern York division and the Western York division were repealed, as the new location of the District Court in Biddeford consolidated the other District Courts in York County and accommodated closure of the District Court locations in Biddeford and York. P.L. 2021, ch. 633, §§ 2, 3. Effective in 2013, the Northern Penobscot division and the Central Penobscot division were combined, creating the Northern and Central Penobscot division. P.L. 2013, ch. 159, §§ 3, 5. The change also authorized the Chief Judge to determine the level of service at the two court locations in Millinocket and Lincoln. *Id.* In 2004, the Northern Androscoggin division was repealed to accommodate closure of the Livermore Falls District Court. P.L. 2003, ch. 673, Pt. JJJ, §2. In 2013,

C. Recommendation Process

Chief Judge Brent Davis and the Administrative Offices of the Courts, in consultation with the judges and clerks for Fort Kent and Caribou, determined that residents of each municipality or unorganized township affected by the Madawaska District Court closure should be reallocated to the nearest District Court location. The Judicial Branch calculated the distances between each municipality and unorganized township to the two nearest courts, Caribou and Fort Kent, and reallocated certain towns to Caribou and certain towns to Fort Kent.

While the Judicial Branch relied primarily on the distance between municipalities and unorganized townships to the nearest place for holding court within a judicial division, the

Judicial Branch also considered the number of courts within each judicial division, the resources available at those courts, and the number of cases filed at those courts.

Table 1. Distance to Fort Kent District Court and Caribou District Court

Town	Distance to Fort Kent	Distance to Caribou	Assigned Court
Madawaska	19.3 miles	47.4 miles	Fort Kent
St. David	22 miles	46.6 miles	Fort Kent
Grand Isle	26.8 miles	38.4 miles	Fort Kent
Lille	29.5 miles	35.7 miles	Fort Kent
Keegan	39.6 miles	25.6 miles	Caribou
Van Buren	42 miles	23.3 miles	Caribou
Hamlin	57 miles	21.8 miles	Caribou
Cyr Plantation	44.3 miles	19.6 miles	Caribou

The non-distance factors provided additional support for allocating residents of municipalities and unorganized townships to the nearest District Court location. The Western Aroostook division included only one District Court location, while the Eastern Aroostook division included a District Court location that occupies the same building as the Aroostook County Superior Court in Caribou. The Caribou location would more likely have two judicial officers working from the courthouse than the Fort Kent location, as both a Superior Court Justice and a District Court Judge are likely to be scheduled on the same day, which allows for sharing any emergency filings or administrative responsibilities at the court. Caribou and Fort Kent each have two courtrooms, but Fort Kent's courtrooms do not accommodate juries and one of Caribou's courtroom can accommodate a jury trial.

A total of 402 civil and family cases were filed in Caribou District Court between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025. The total between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025, at the Fort Kent and Madawaska District Courts, combined, was a total of 325 civil and family cases. The number of filings was determined to have minimal, if any, impact upon court operations and resources in Fort Kent and Caribou.

Thus, the Court determined residents of Keegan (T17 R3), Van Buren, Hamlin Plantation, and Cyr Plantation would be closer to Caribou without overburdening the court's resources.

D. Recommendations for Redrawing Geographic Boundaries

The Judicial Branch recommends that the Judicial Division of Western Aroostook be changed to remove Keegan (T17 R3), Van Buren, Hamlin Plantation, and Cyr Plantation from the Western Aroostook division. Instead, the statute should effectively redraw the border of the Western Aroostook division to begin at Grand Isle.

Because the Eastern Aroostook division is defined as certain towns “and all municipalities and unorganized territory in Aroostook County lying to the north of these up to the boundary of the division of Western Aroostook,” if the boundary between divisions is changed, the Eastern Aroostook division will include Keegan (T17 R3), Van Buren, Hamlin Plantation, and Cyr Plantation without any changes to the statute. The recommendation to remove Keegan (T17 R3), Van Buren, Hamlin Plantation, and Cyr Plantation from the Western Aroostook division allows residents of those municipalities or unorganized territories to go to the nearest court and eliminates any potential confusion if the statute is not aligned with current Judicial Branch operations.

The change to statutory language is below:

3. Western Aroostook. Western Aroostook consists of the municipalities and unorganized territory known as ~~Grand Isle, Hamlin Plantation, Cyr Plantation, T17 R3~~, T17 R4, T16 R5, T15 R6, Winterville Plantation, T15 R8, T15 R9, T14 R10, T14 R11, T14 R12, T14 R13, T14 R14, T14 R15, T14 R16 and all municipalities and unorganized territory in Aroostook County lying to the west and north of these. The District Court for Western Aroostook must be held at Fort Kent.

At this time, the change to the Western Aroostook division is the only recommended change to 4 M.R.S. § 153. The Judicial Branch may determine it is appropriate to revise boundaries, combine divisions, or change the place for holding court in other locations in the future.