



# Maine County Commissioners Association

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## *LD 1543, Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Recommend Cost-effective, Safe, Administrable and Healthful Programs to Reduce Violence in Prisons and Jails*

April 25, 2023

Chair Beebe-Center, Chair Salisbury, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Stephen Gorden and in addition to serving as a member of the board of commissioners for Cumberland County, I am writing today in my role as chair of the legislative policy committee of the Maine County Commissioners Association. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee *neither for nor against* LD 1543.

**About MCCA.** Briefly, the Maine County Commissioners Association was established in 1890 to assist Maine's county government in providing vital services to Maine citizens in a responsive, efficient, and credible manner. The Association is based in Augusta, represents all 16 of Maine's counties, and is governed by a board with representation from each participating county.

**What does LD 1543 do?** LD 1543 establishes the Commission to Recommend Cost-effective, Safe, Administrable and Healthful Programs to Reduce Violence in Prisons and Jails. The Commission is directed to examine the issue of violence in prisons and jails in the State, including the development of measures to reduce that violence, and to submit a report to the Legislature by December 6, 2023. Additionally, the Commission would be comprised of 15 members representing stakeholders from a diverse array of backgrounds, including representatives from the Department of Corrections, Maine Medical Association, a racial justice organization, and several other organizations.

**If the Commission is established, it should include a representative of county commissioners.** The study commission proposed by this bill would evaluate a number of important and complex issues related to violence in jails, and with or without this Commission, county government takes these issues seriously and will continue to work on reducing violence in county jails. The safety of our employees and our incarcerated is extremely important. That said, our Association does not take a position as to whether the Legislature should establish this particular Commission to study these issues. However, if the Legislature decides to move forward with this bill and establishes such a study Commission, we would respectfully suggest that a county commissioner representative be included as a member on the Commission.

County governments run county jails and expend significant financial resources on the operation of such facilities. In this regard, having a county commissioner representative on the Commission would bring important fiscal and governance experience to the Commission's discussions.

**Conclusion.** We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill, and if you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Gorden

**Comments of MCCA re LD 1543**

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Chair, Legislative Policy Committee

cc: Commissioner Richard Dutremble, President, MCCA  
James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP, MCCA Legislative Counsel