

Michael Gahagan  
Caribou  
LD 1457

Statement in Support of L.D. 1457

An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for a Jail in Caribou

Submitted by Chief Michael W. Gahagan

April 25, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. My name is Michael W. Gahagan, and I am the Chief of Police of the Caribou Police Department. I am submitting testimony on L.D. 1457.

Caribou is the second largest city in Aroostook County, a community of 8,189 located at the heart of rural Northern Maine, approximately twenty minutes from the Canadian border. Caribou is in the geographical center of Aroostook County and is the hub of spokes serving the area.

The Police Department currently has (14) full-time employees and (6) part-time (reserve) employees. There is potential for growth in both types and numbers of employees .

Caribou Police currently operate from a small space in the basement of the current City Hall that was built in 1937. The working space represents approximately three thousand square feet. At our current location we have (3) adults' cells and (1) Juvenile holding cell with a small processing room. The Department is a 72-hr. holding facility.

The Caribou Police Department is the only holding facility in Northern Aroostook besides the Aroostook County Jail that is in Houlton. The County Jail is 55 miles away from us and over 100 miles from the Town of Fort Kent. Due to the expansive area of the County, Law Enforcement are not able to transport a prisoner from the northern reaches of the County all the way to Houlton and must use the holding facility at Caribou. Caribou Police Department is an asset and most specifically, their holding cells for prisoners, office space, interview rooms, prisoner booking areas, garage space, room for evidence processing and whatever is needed.

The Aroostook District and Superior Court are also located in the City of Caribou and must utilize the holding facility when subjects are sentence to jail.

Law Enforcement agencies in northern Aroostook County depend on the 72-hour holding facility. Utilizing the facility saves those communities time and money by not transporting prisoners to the Aroostook County Jail. The pandemic has compounded the problem of agencies not bringing prisoners to the County Jail.

Because of several outbreaks of COVID, the County jail in Houlton had been temporarily closed on several occasions. This closure left no place for those under arrest, the City of Caribou and its Police Department readily made available for all law enforcement agencies in the County, if not these agencies would be driving a prisoner as far south as Portland. The Caribou holding facility saved these agencies a significant amount of money and time. When a prisoner transport occurs, it takes two officers out of their community. This not only jeopardized the officers but the safety of their community.

The Caribou Police holding facility, on an average yearly will hold about 350 prisoners, and in 2022 at the height of COVID the facility held 477 prisoners. Not only does the facility hold the prisoners but now through ZOOM we have court arraignment where the prisoners can speak to an attorney and then to the Judge. The new Caribou Police Station is planned to have (4) four holding cells and (2) Juvenile/flex holding cells for a total of (6) cells. This area is about 2684 sq feet and that would also include a secure media room for prisoner arraignment.

I hope that you will vote in favor of LD 1457. On behalf of the Caribou Police Department and the Citizens of Caribou and Aroostook, I want to thank you for your work on this Committee.