

**TESTIMONY before the Committee on Appropriations and Financial
Affairs**
Regarding LD 258
Increase funding to the County Jail Operations Fund

May 17, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Committee: My name is Travis Kennedy. I'm the Director of Public Affairs for Cumberland County Government, and I'm here to speak on behalf of the County regarding funding for the County Jail Operations Fund.

County Jails, like most public and private entities, are struggling with rising costs. Aggressive and persistent inflation - and a highly competitive job market - have significantly driven up the cost of operating a jail. Counties are limited in how much we can ask the taxpayers to shoulder this burden.

Over the last several biennia, the state has seen fit to match the counties' cost of operating jails at a rate of about 20 percent. That funding partnership has generally worked well, providing counties with support in the face of constantly increasing costs - but during the past two years especially, the cost of operating jails has outpaced the state's commitment.

The current draft of the budget flat-funds the County Jail Operations Fund from the previous biennium. But in the face of rising costs, **funding for county corrections is falling behind by standing still.**

Data from the Maine County Commissioners Association shows that county jail expenditures are projected to increase about 7% per year in 2024 and 2025. We're asking the state to maintain its commitment to fund county jails at 20 percent. Based on projected costs, that would require another \$7,765,879 over the biennium.

These funds are necessary for counties to continue operating jails that are safe and effective rehabilitation sites not just for the inmates housed there, but for the staff who work at the jail in service to the safety and prosperity of their communities and state.

Thank you for your time today, and for your consideration of this very important issue. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.