

**TESTIMONY before the Committee on Appropriations and Financial
Affairs**
Regarding LD 2214

Feb 29, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Committee: my name is Travis Kennedy. I'm the Director of Public Affairs for Cumberland County government. I'm here to speak on behalf of the County regarding jail funding in the supplemental budget.

County Jails, like most public and private entities, are struggling with rising costs. Aggressive and persistent inflation, a highly competitive job market, and the pressures of meeting complex mandates have significantly driven up the cost of operating a jail.

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 three years, the cost of operating jails has outpaced the state's commitment.

Case in point: the current budget increased funding to Maine Department of Corrections by 20.6% over the past four years, recognizing the exorbitant increase in the costs of operating correctional facilities in the current climate. Over the same period of time, state contributions to County jails have increased by only 3.4%. Even though the standards governing incarceration -- including the provision of medication assisted treatment -- are set by state statute and/or regulations established by the Department of Corrections.

The legislature saw fit to create a County Jail Professional Standards Council, and that group voted unanimously in December to request an increase to the Operations Fund by \$7.8 million over the biennium to cover the identified shortfalls related to the operation of county jails, based on a detailed review of expenditures showing that costs will increase about 7% per year in 2024 and 2025 due to higher wages needed to retain staff, higher medical costs, and higher costs of basic necessities like food, fuel, and electricity.

The Governor's FY 24-25 Supplemental Budget proposal \$4 million in one-time State funding for county jails. We support the \$4M appropriation for FY 25, but we request that the AFA Committee consider a similar contribution for FY 24, and commit to an ongoing increase in the

Maine
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state appropriation equal to at least \$4M per year. This aligns with the Professional Standards Council's recommendations.

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 hard work on behalf of the people of Cumberland County and the State of Maine. We would be happy to discuss the matter further.

Travis Kennedy
Cumberland County
LD 2214

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