



Maine County Commissioners Association

4 Gabriel Drive, Suite 2 Augusta, ME 04330, 207-623-4697
www.mainecounties.org

March 18, 2025

Sen. Anne Beebe-Center, Chair
Rep. Tavis Hasenfus, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice &
Public Safety
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: *Comments of MCCA on LD 647, An Act Regarding Telephone and Video Call Access in Detention and Correctional Facilities and Jails*

Dear Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

On behalf of the Maine County Commissioners Association, we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony **neither for nor against** LD 647. While we acknowledge the intent to enhance communication access for individuals, we must express our reservations about this bill due to its potential financial implications for county jails and local taxpayers.

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 647 do? LD 647 proposes to require county jails and correctional facilities to provide residents with at least 90 minutes of free telephone and video calls per week. The bill also prohibits jails from collecting revenue from these communication services, shifting the financial responsibility for maintaining these systems to the facilities, which are primarily funded by local taxpayers.

Current Funding Mechanism. Presently, county jails partner with service providers to offer telephone and/or video call services to residents. The fees collected from these services are not merely operational costs but serve as a crucial revenue stream. These funds are utilized to:

- **Cover service expenses:** Ensure the maintenance and availability of communication infrastructure within the facilities.
- **Support indigent resident services:** Provide essential services to residents who lack financial resources, including legal assistance, counseling, and rehabilitation programs.

Financial Impact of LD 647. By mandating free telephone and video calling services, the bill would eliminate a significant source of revenue that county jails currently depend upon to fund both communication services and programs for indigent residents. This bill will lead to an increased burden on local taxpayers. With approximately 80% of jail operational costs already shouldered by local taxpayers, the removal of this revenue stream would necessitate compensating for the shortfall through increased local funding. This shift would place an undue financial burden on our communities, many of which are already facing fiscal constraints.

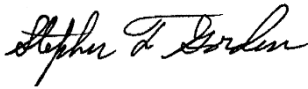
March 18, 2025

Page 2

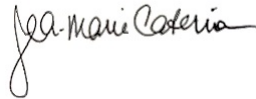
Unfunded mandate. Under Maine's constitution, when state laws or rules impose costs on a unit of government, the state is responsible for 90% of the costs unless otherwise approved by both houses of the Maine Legislature with a 2/3 vote. We believe the mandating of video calls and the removal of external funding sources would qualify as a local mandate requiring a mandate preamble.

Conclusion. While we support initiatives aimed at improving the welfare of jail residents, LD 647, in its current form, poses financial challenges for county jails and local taxpayers. We urge the committee to consider these implications carefully and explore alternative solutions that balance the need for enhanced communication access with the fiscal realities faced by our county correctional facilities. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony neither for nor against LD 647. If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Respectfully submitted,



Stephen Gorden
Co-Chair, Legislative Policy Committee, MCCA



Jean-Marie Caterina
Co-Chair, Legislative Policy Committee, MCCA

cc: Commissioner Andre Cushing, President, MCCA