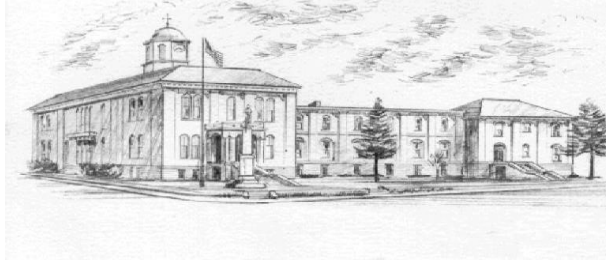


ANDROSCOGGIN COUNTY

COMMISSIONERS

Andrew Lewis, Chair
Jane Pentheny, Vice-Chair
Shukri Abdirahman
Roland Poirier
Brian Ames
Garrett Mason
Sally Christner



COUNTY

ADMINISTRATOR
Jeff Chute
Androscoggin County
2 Turner Street
Auburn, ME 04210
Tel. No. (207) 753-2500
Fax No. (207) 782-5367

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Jeff Chute, and I currently serve as County Administrator for Androscoggin County. Prior to this, I was the Jail Administrator — and that dual perspective has made one thing abundantly clear: our county jails are at a financial breaking point.

Since the dissolution of the Board of Corrections, jails have seen no meaningful increase in state support — despite rising costs in nearly every operational area: medical care, food, staffing, and mandated services. In Androscoggin County alone, we ended the last fiscal year \$300,000 in a deficit. This year, that number is projected to exceed \$400,000.

Our only current source of added revenue is the property tax — placing yet another burden on already struggling taxpayers. Meanwhile, the Department of Corrections continues to receive annual increases in its state funding. More troubling is that DOC has testified against more funding for jails — despite our shared responsibilities within the same criminal justice system.

County jails today are responsible for multiple **mandates**, to name a few:

- **Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) programs,**
- **Rated capacity compliance, and**
- **Mental Health Treatment**
- **Medical Treatment**
- **Transport and housing of prisoners**

This last issue in particular has created growing inequity. DOC often delays the intake of sentenced inmates — often for days or even a week — placing the burden entirely on counties. In Androscoggin, this results in **hundreds of added bed days annually** for which we receive no compensation. DOC benefits from a reduced population, but it comes at the direct expense of local jails.

County jails are no longer simply holding facilities. We have become the **emergency rooms of the correctional system** — managing acute mental illness, addiction, physical health, and dental

needs. Jails are routinely transporting prisoners to and from hospitals, adding not only expenses but a large safety concern, hospital transports are the number one escape attempt from jails nationwide. Last year, Androscoggin spent:

- \$150,000 on MAT,
- \$345,000 on mental health treatment, and
- Over \$1.2 million on contracted medical care — a figure that continues to grow.
- \$62,000 emergency room costs.

It has also been suggested that jails do not do enough to reduce costs or collaborate across counties. As someone who's served on multiple statewide committees such as — prisoner transfer coordination, health care contract consolidation, repurposing of common items and bulk purchasing — I can assure you that is not correct. Jails are not one-size-fits-all. Structural, geographic, and population differences require flexibility, not one blanket solution.

I respectfully urge this committee to recognize the essential role county jails play in Maine's justice system — and the untenable position we have been placed in without adequate funding. We are absorbing the cost of unfunded mandates, housing state inmates, and delivering services — all while relying on local taxpayers to close the gap.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.
