

**Cumberland County Commissioners**

27 Northport Drive, Portland, Maine 04103

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**Breana N. Gersen, Assistant County Manager**

**Testimony in Opposition to LD 2212**

*“An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027”*

February 24, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Gattine, Representative Hasenus and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Breana Gersen, and I am the Assistant County Manager of Cumberland County.

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I am writing to provide testimony in opposition LD 2212 due to its failure to provide sufficient funding for county jails. Cumberland County strongly urges this committee to consider additional funding for county jails to address shortfalls in the current funding model.

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Cumberland County has reached a tipping point and is no longer able to absorb persistent and escalating jail costs without additional State support. Despite careful fiscal management and multiple rounds of budget reductions, the County is projecting a **13% property tax rate increase** for fiscal year 2026/2027. Of that increase, approximately **10% is attributable to operations at the Cumberland County Jail (CCJ)**, while only **4% is attributable to general county operations**. The remaining 1% difference reflects a reduction in operational expenses at the Cross Insurance Arena.

Cumberland County is not facing a spending problem- it is facing a structural funding problem. County jail budgets are very linear and built without a lot of discretionary funding that can be cut. For example, the County currently has 32 unfunded correction officer positions and cannot responsibly cut staffing levels further without compromising safety. Furthermore, the County has constitutional and statutory obligations to provide adequate food, facilities, and medical care to inmates.

The County anticipates **the tax revenue required to operate the CCJ will exceed \$21.5 million, which is an increase of more than \$4.3 million over the last fiscal year**. A significant driver of this increase is the anticipated loss of federal revenue.

Cumberland County received approximately \$3.6 million in FY 2025/2026 under a contract with the United States Marshal’s Service for reimbursement of costs to house federal inmates at the CCJ. While this revenue helped offset rising jail costs, it was never a stable or sustainable solution. Revenue under this contract is highly uncertain- funding can decrease or end abruptly without any contract negotiations or amendments. Without this revenue, Cumberland County’s experience now more accurately mirrors that of other counties, where increasing costs shift directly to local property taxpayers.

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Other sources contributing to this anticipated increase are rising staffing costs necessary to recruit and retain qualified corrections professionals; rising food costs and increased need for specialized dietary accommodations; and escalating medical and behavioral health costs.

The CCJ is one of the largest mental health and substance abuse treatment providers in the region, frequently diagnosing and treating individuals with unaddressed health conditions at a critical time in their life. **Annual cost to provide quality medical care at the CCJ exceeds \$4.4 million.** While the County takes pride in its efforts to address behavioral health issues inside the jail and through re-entry programs, Department of Corrections and legislative mandates related have significantly expanded the scope of services the County is required to provide at the jail. These mandates have not been matched with sustainable, recurring funding.

The State currently funds a portion of county jail costs through the County Jail Operations Fund (34-A M.R.S. § 1210-E). However, this model is outdated and structurally flawed. It establishes a static funding level that does not adjust annually for inflation, healthcare cost growth, or new State-imposed mandates. Cumberland County received \$3,968,303 in State funding under this model for FY26 and anticipates the same funding in the upcoming fiscal year.

The Legislature appropriated an additional \$4 million statewide in FY26 (LD 210) to support mandated MAT and medical care requirements at county jails, including substance use disorder screening, assessment, medication, treatment, recovery and reentry services as required by 34-A M.R.S. § 1208-B(4). Under this appropriation Cumberland County received an additional \$791,615. Although it is estimated that the additional appropriation failed to cover the full costs for the County to provide the required services (the MAT costs above do not include screening, assessment, recovery, and reentry services also provided by the County), the additional appropriation was vital to funding County jail operations.

**The proposed budget does not include an adjustment to the static base funding formula, nor does it continue the additional \$4 million appropriation for substance use disorder programs.** If enacted as proposed, approximately 85% of Cumberland County jail costs in the next fiscal year will be borne by local property taxpayers, a significant burden resulting from a broken funding model.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to provide testimony.