

MATTHEW RHODES

Unity

LD 2232

Testimony in Opposition to LD 2232 (HP 1507)

An Act to Increase County Jail Funding

Senator, Representative, and Members of the Committee,

I write in opposition to LD 2232.

This bill is not simply an adjustment to funding levels—it is a structural change in how Maine finances its jail system. And it is a change that deserves much closer scrutiny.

We are being told this bill addresses rising costs. But what it actually does is guarantee growth.

It increases baseline funding by millions of dollars, adds additional program funding, and then permanently locks in a 4% annual increase—before any evaluation of outcomes, performance, or actual need. That is not responsive budgeting. That is automatic expansion.

More importantly, the bill ties funding directly to “prisoner days.” That means the level of incarceration becomes the basis for how much money a county receives.

Whether intended or not, that is a policy decision. It creates a financial incentive structure where higher usage of the jail system results in higher funding.

For over a decade, Maine has moved—at least in principle—toward reducing unnecessary incarceration through pretrial reform and community-based alternatives. This bill quietly shifts the incentive in the opposite direction. It embeds growth into the system and aligns funding with utilization, rather than with outcomes or efficiency. In other words, this bill does not solve a problem—it builds a system that depends on its own expansion.

If costs are rising, then address those costs directly, transparently, and with accountability. But do not create a permanent escalator tied to system usage without first asking whether that system should be growing at all.

There is also no clear emergency here. Rising costs are not a sudden or unforeseen crisis—they are a known condition that should be addressed through the normal legislative process. The emergency clause serves only to accelerate a long-term structural change without sufficient deliberation.

This Legislature should be cautious about embedding automatic growth mechanisms into any system—especially one as serious as incarceration. Once in place, these structures are rarely revisited, and they shape behavior in ways that are difficult to reverse.

I urge you to reject this bill, or at the very least, remove the automatic increases and reconsider the funding formula so that it does not incentivize expansion of the jail population.

Respectfully submitted,