

Cumberland County Commissioners

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Testimony In Support of LD 2232
“An Act to Increase County Jail Funding”

March 17, 2026

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Breana Gersen, and I am the Assistant County Manager of Cumberland County. I am writing to provide testimony in support of LD 2232.

Similar to other counties in the State, Cumberland County is facing a challenging budget year due to rising costs and declining revenue to support the Cumberland County Jail (CCJ). Despite careful fiscal management and multiple rounds of budget reductions, the County adopted a budget with a **12.9% property tax rate increase** for FY 26/27. Of that increase, approximately **10% is attributable to operations at the CCJ**, while less than **4% is attributable to general County operations**. The remaining difference reflects a reduction in operational expenses at the Cross Insurance Arena.

The impact of rising jail costs is being felt more acutely now because the County can no longer incorporate federal revenue received under contract with the United States Marshal’s Service to house federal inmates at the CCJ in the County budget. In previous budget years this revenue was used to reduce the impact of rising jail costs on County taxpayers and avoid depleting the County’s unassigned fund balance. However, this revenue was never intended to be a reliable funding source- as it could, and did, disappear overnight. As a result, the loss of this revenue unmasked the systemic issues associated with the statutory jail funding model that the County would have otherwise faced.

Cumberland County has reached a tipping point and is no longer able to absorb persistent and escalating jail costs without additional State support. The County anticipates **the tax revenue required to operate the CCJ will exceed \$21.5 million, which is an increase of more than \$4 million over the previous fiscal year**. In addition to the loss of federal revenue, other sources contributing to this increase include: 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 point in their life. **The annual cost to provide quality medical care to inmates at the CCJ is expected to exceed \$4.4 million in FY 26/27**. While the County takes pride in its efforts to address behavioral health issues inside the jail and through re-entry programs, the expanding scope of medical and health services the County is required to provide to inmates by statute and DOC regulations has placed significant strain on the County budget. Although the Legislature provided \$4 million to counties in FY26 to support medically assisted treatment for inmates with substance use disorders, this one-time

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funding has not been included in the FY27 supplemental budget. Moreover, although appreciated, the FY26 funding only partially covered the County’s actual costs to meet these statutory obligations.

LD 2232 addresses critical shortcomings in the statutory county jail funding model and will provide immediate and long-term relief for counties and taxpayers. First, increasing the base funding by \$8 million in FY 2026 acknowledges that the current fixed funding level established by state law is insufficient to meet counties’ needs, particularly in light of rising costs associated with providing basic care and ensuring inmate safety. The proposed annual 4% increase in subsequent years recognizes the need for a funding model that adjusts to inflation and cost growth, rather than allowing shortfalls to compound over time.

Second, LD 2232 provides additional \$5 million in funding for community corrections by statute. Currently, state law requires counties to apply 25% of its base funding for this purpose. This amendment would establish a stable, ongoing funding source rather than relying on annual legislative appropriations—which, as current conditions demonstrate, cannot always be counted on during budget development.

Together, these changes would provide predictable, recurring funding that counties can rely on during the annual budget process to reduce the burden on property taxpayers. Since county jail budgets are linear and built without a lot of discretionary funding, the County cannot simply cut costs to achieve this same result.

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