

MAINE SERVICE CENTERS COALITION

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Testimony of the Maine Service Centers Coalition LD 2232, An Act to Increase County Jail Funding (Emergency)

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, the Maine Service Centers Coalition is submitting testimony in support of LD 2232, An Act to Increase County Jail Funding (Emergency).

The Maine Service Centers Coalition, comprised of 27 towns and cities across the state, articulates the importance of healthy and thriving service center communities, advocates for public policy that supports and contributes to the economic and social viability of our communities, and collaborates with municipal officials, legislators, state agencies and nonprofits to pursue quality of life for all who live and work in our state.

The County Corrections Professional Standards Council was directed by Legislative Resolve to develop biennial and supplemental budget recommendations for consideration by this Committee. As a result of the Council's report, LD 2232 proposes increasing State funding to the County Jail Operations Fund, beginning in the next fiscal year and with an ongoing annual increase. The bill also proposes revising the distribution of funds based on the most current budget data available.

The rising cost of funding jail operations is tied directly to the growing property tax burdens placed on our homeowners and businesses. As with so many other programs, the State sets performance standards that jails must meet, but does not provide additional funding to pay for the requirements. Costs to implement these standards fall onto the Counties and, in turn, onto our residents who must pay higher County assessments through their property taxes.

These increases are felt deeply in our service center communities. Androscoggin County's budget increased 13%, primarily for jail operations. Bangor's portion of the County tax bill is \$6.08 million, a full \$1 million more than last year.

While our municipalities and our property taxpayers dutifully pay our share for jails, it is necessary for the state to fulfill its obligation to appropriately fund these facilities. Additional state funds, as proposed in this bill, would certainly help alleviate some of the pressure that now falls squarely onto our property owners – who are in desperate need of relief.

The Maine Service Centers Coalition respectfully urges you to vote ought to pass on LD 2232.

Thank you for your time and attention.