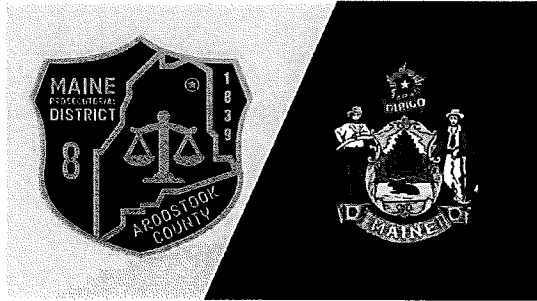


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PROSECUTORIAL DISTRICT NUMBER 8

“An Act to Provide Funding for Prosecutor Positions”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
Public Hearing Date: March 28, 2023
Testimony in Support of LD 186

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Kari Wells-Puckett and I am the Deputy District Attorney for District VIII (Aroostook County) and am here to testify in support of LD 186.

Background

I have worked for the Aroostook County District Attorney’s Office for seven and a half years. Prior to being hired by District VIII, I was in private practice for approximately 6 years. I am based in the Presque Isle Office with one other Assistant District Attorney. In 2022, we jointly prosecuted over 1000 cases. This number does not reflect holdover cases from previous years, juvenile cases, appellate work, or probation revocations.

Work Schedule

My work schedule typically exceeds 10 hours per day and I work most weekends. In addition to my regular work schedule, I field phone calls and review warrants from law enforcement most evenings after hours and on the weekend. I currently have 5-6 weeks of vacation banked due to difficulty in scheduling vacation opportunities.

Responsibilities and Court Schedule

District VIII currently employs five ADA’s and a Deputy District Attorney. The Aroostook County DA’s Office has no specialized prosecutors or trial prep assistants. Our prosecutors are responsible for all trial and hearing preparation as well as appellate work and post-conviction reviews. Aroostook County prosecutes all MDEA cases that arise within our jurisdiction.

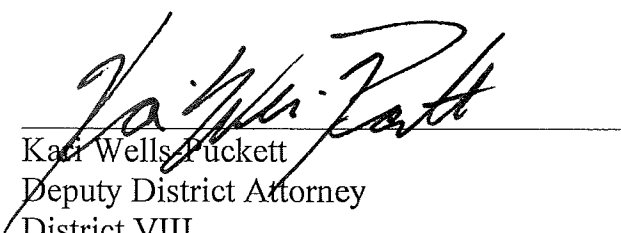
Court demands for prosecutors' time have exponentially increased in the last two years. Before the COVID pandemic, Aroostook County held in-custody initial appearances and arraignments three times per week. In-custodies are now held daily. The time allotted for in-custodies now includes specially set bail reviews and pleas. The Court provides each of our offices with set dates for the year for arraignments, dispositional conferences, motion hearings, docket call, and juvenile matters. However, prosecutors are regularly required to appear in court nearly every day of the work week. The Court provides scheduling notices and emails requiring our appearance on "non-criminal" days for pleas, bail hearings, bench trials, probation revocation hearings, hearings on motions to revoke bail, and status conferences (among other things). Sometimes our notice for these additional court appearances is less than 24 hours.

The amount of preparation necessary to adequately prepare for hearings (including witness preparation, legal research, and review of increasingly voluminous digital and video evidence) requires a substantial time commitment. We don't just want to prosecute cases but prosecute them successfully and with confidence.

Due to the immense amount of court time and preparation for court appearances, prosecutors must work additional long hours to complete our routine office responsibilities and tasks. The current pace is not sustainable, and many prosecutors in my office are experiencing "burn out".

I am proud to be a prosecutor. Each day is satisfying and rewarding. Additional resources will help retain and attract prosecutors and alleviate current stresses.

For these reasons, I am in support of LD 186.



Kari Wells Puckett
Deputy District Attorney
District VIII