



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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May 16, 2023

Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier supporting
LD 360, An Act to Amend the Androscoggin County Charter
LD 371, An Act to Address Certain Local Zoning Ordinances
Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Good afternoon, Senator Nangle, Representative Stover and esteemed colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. I am Representative Kristen Cloutier and I represent House District #94, part of my hometown of Lewiston. I am testifying today in strong support of LDs 360 and 371, which would assist Androscoggin County in its efforts to relocate its Sheriff's Department.

First, let me provide some background information.

The Androscoggin County Sheriff's Department currently resides in the county building in Auburn, which is in dire disrepair. They have purchased a new building that fits all of their needs, is structurally sound and is in a prime location near the City's new fire station on Route 4, headed towards Turner. In early 2022, the City of Auburn became aware that the County was closing on this property. Unsupportive of the move, Auburn's City Council passed a moratorium on new public safety buildings to block the Sheriff's Department from occupying the building they had just purchased. This moratorium was extended until this past winter, when they enacted a new ordinance requiring the County to gain approval from the Planning Board, but then allowing the City Council to later arbitrarily deny it. Since then, the City of Auburn has consistently blocked relocation to the Route 4 site, expressing concerns that a new jail would be erected there. Meanwhile, the County continues to maintain the opposite, going so far as to bar itself from ever doing so in the deed to the property. The County Commission has tried unsuccessfully for over a year to work with the City to address these baseless claims and roadblocks, all while Androscoggin County deputies breathe in black mold and trudge through ankle deep water from seasonal flooding in their current building.

These two bills would provide a means of resolving the current situation.

LD 360 would allow Androscoggin County government buildings to be located in either Auburn or Lewiston, giving the County the flexibility it needs to deliver public services in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible. This would provide a simple and expedient solution should Auburn continue to be an unfriendly and unwilling host to county government. While the

referendum process would be the usual procedure for the transition of a county seat, correcting the problem through legislative action is necessary in this circumstance given the County's current challenges with the City and the prospect of having to publicly campaign against its second largest member.

LD 371 would ensure that the approval process for the new Sheriff's Department reverts back to a logical and pragmatic system, free from the political and personal considerations currently taking place. It applies ONLY to new public safety and government buildings and exempts jails and detention centers, eliminating the City of Auburn's stated concern.

For many reasons, locating the Sheriff's Department on the Route 4 site would be beneficial. It will shorten response time for calls for service outside of Auburn, it will spread the public safety footprint across more of the City (instead of being next door to the Auburn Police Department where it is currently located), and it will act as a deterrent for some of the dangerous driving on Route 4 that results in multiple fatal crashes every year. Most importantly, it will provide employees of the Sheriff's Department with a new workplace free from public health and safety hazards.

I am happy to support Androscoggin County and our Sheriff's Department in these efforts and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.