

Jared Bornstein

Support for LD 360 & 371

Good afternoon Senator Nangle, Representative Stover and esteemed members of the State and Local Government committee. I am here today representing the Androscoggin County Commission. We regretfully are in front of you all asking for your help to resolve some issues that have been weighing on the Commission for some time now. You have the power to alleviate these problems with your vote in support of LD's 360 and 371. These problems center around an aging and decrepit sheriff's office that presents workplace safety issues for the Deputies and support staff. The Commission responded to the need for a new building by purchasing a property using ARPA funds, a lifeline for the county that came from COVID policy. The building is paid for and ready to be used, but is being arbitrarily blocked by the City of Auburn. The county commission has met every request for more information, changing and adding aspects of the project to appease the city. Each time a barrier has been overcome another is erected with the ultimate goal of this project being abandoned and the Sheriff's department staying in the moldy basement they currently work out of.

The need for these bills has been accurately described by others, so I will focus on the bills themselves. First, LD 360 allows the county commission to search for and eventually occupy buildings outside of Auburn, in Lewiston, should the relationship with its county seat remain untenable. There is no pragmatic or logical difference between the two cities, this bill just allows the county to have the flexibility they need. I want to be clear that there is currently a process for changing the county seat, which involves a referendum. The reason the county decided to come to the legislature for this change is specifically that we wish to avoid a referendum. We fear that a campaign for this referendum would be fought between a county and the county seat and it would not serve the interest of the taxpayers. It would be expensive, messy and is unnecessary.

The second bill, LD 371 addresses the issue of the sheriff's department directly. It exempts public safety and government buildings from the new onerous approval process that the city put in place specifically targeting the new sheriff's department. This bill does not create a special process or exemption for the county, it negates a special process that was designed to hinder their efforts at a new sheriff's department building. The county will still have to go through the normal approval process, the same approval process that was in place before they were unfairly and specifically targeted. This law is also targeted only at this situation, being a private and special law, it will not have any unintended consequences because of how specific to this situation it is.

Thank you for hearing these bills, I look forward to any questions that the committee may have.