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Testimony of Representative Jennifer Poirier presenting

LD 2090 “An Act to Modernize and Consolidate Certain Court Facilities”

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Chair Carney, Chair Moonen and distinguished colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Jennifer Poirier, and I proudly represent House District 70, which is comprised of Skowhegan. I am pleased to stand before you today in staunch support of **LD 2090, An Act to Modernize and Consolidate Certain Court Facilities**.

LD 2090 is necessary to make desperately needed improvements to our court facilities. This bill will allow for expenditures to complete expansions and consolidations. My testimony will focus on facilities in Somerset County, which are based in my community of Skowhegan.

The Somerset County Superior Court resides at 41 Court Street, across the street from the District Court. It is a building that was built in 1873-1874 and remodeled in 1904. It is a historic type, three-story, brick building that I was able to tour last year. I was amazed by the old, ornate features of the building, but quickly realized that this building is not adequate for our modern-day courts. The heating and ventilation system is questionable to say the least. The “jury room” was not much larger than my walk-in closet and does not provide adequate privacy, as it is a doorway right out of the courtroom. There is limited space for files to be stored, so they are kept in an attic area. Unfortunately, the building has a history of bat infestations and many files have been destroyed by bat guano. Numerous attempts have been made to rid the building of the bats, but they continue their destruction. Perhaps the most unsettling issue is that Marshall’s cannot always cover all parts of the building. Our judge sighted times when defendants casually walked into his chambers after a case concluded. This presents safety hazards.

Across the street, the District Court building presents more concerns. Construction of the building was completed in 1997. There are a minimal number of courtrooms to conduct hearings

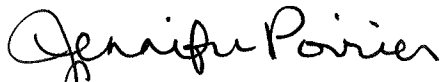
and a limited number of private rooms for consultations and mediation. A major issue is in the clerk's office. The clerks have run out of room for their files. Clerks are now storing their files on makeshift shelves in the secured hallways. This makes their job difficult when searching for files. My visit to the court proved that more space is needed to run the courts efficiently.

The Judicial branch has already purchased the property located between the courthouse and the court's parking lot. This gives adequate room for expansion of the building. Expansion of the District Court would allow for consolidation of the courts. A consolidation would ultimately cut costs and better serve the people of Somerset County. Staffing of Court Marshalls is better addressed when courts are under one roof.

I am certain that the courts of Androscoggin and Hancock counties face similar challenges.

Colleagues who have worked with me for any length of time are aware that I am cautious about spending taxpayer money. However, LD 2090 has my full support. I believe that improvements to these court facilities will lead to savings and efficiency. I ask that you join me in supporting LD 2090.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any question you may have.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Poirier".

Rep. Jennifer Poirier