

# Administrative Office of the Courts

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## **Judicial Branch testimony in favor of LD 20, An Act Regarding the First Judicial District and the District Court Locations in the Judicial Divisions of Androscoggin and Western Aroostook:**

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Julie Finn and I represent the Judicial Branch. LD 20 was submitted by the Judicial Branch and I am here today to testify in support of the bill.

The Judicial Branch plans to close the Madawaska District Court, which is presently open only two days per month. This change will increase the operational efficiency of the courts.

There are many reasons for this proposal which are enumerated below:

- There is a comparatively small number of cases that are heard in Madawaska resulting in the court opening for two days per month, one day for criminal matters and one day for civil and family matters.
- The eight towns that currently go to court in Madawaska can be added to the geographic regions being served by courts in Fort Kent and Caribou. The farthest distance from any one of those towns to a new court location is 29.5 miles. Other court locations in Aroostook County include Presque Isle and Houlton.
- While the fiscal note is not finalized, we expect to see savings of approximately \$50,000 per year, which includes rent, overtime and travel.
- In addition to the hard costs outlined above, if the court were to remain open, there would be increased costs in the coming fiscal year. These costs include a likely increase in rent, improvements to the building to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and technology upgrades needed to implement the Odyssey/Enterprise Justice e filing system.
- There are also security concerns with the space. Due to the layout of the building, the clerk's window is near the front door while entry screening occurs further down the hallway. The current layout of the building does not allow any other setup.
- Because the Madawaska court is only open two days per month, it does not serve the public as other full-time courts do. In other courts, the clerk's window is open to assist

individuals by answering questions, accepting filings, and recording fine payments. Protection From Abuse complaints may be filed by email, making filing at any courthouse unnecessary.

- Because the Madawaska court is only open two days per month, it cannot accept filings, motions, or anything else delivered to the court by the US Postal Service. However, the notices of court proceedings that occur in Madawaska list the Madawaska address because that is where litigants have to appear for court. This can create problems for court users. For example, if an individual is summonsed to the Madawaska's court address for a hearing, calls in and wishes not to contest the matter and pay the waivable fine, and subsequently sends the fine to the address in Madawaska, this piece of mail will not be delivered and the court will not know that the fine has been paid. This could result in a warrant being issued.

- Finally, because the Madawaska court files are kept in Fort Kent, the clerk must transport two to three boxes of physical files, and at the end of the day, transport them back.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.