



Maine Sheriffs' Association

"One Team, One Mission"

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March 3, 2025

TESTIMONY OF SHERIFF TROY MORTON MAINE SHERIFFS ASSOCIATION

LD 719 - An Act to Amend the Share of State Funding for the County Jail Operations Fund

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee of Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is Sheriff Troy Morton. I have the privilege of serving as Vice-President of the Maine Sheriffs Association and I am here today on their behalf.

Your Maine Sheriffs have taken the position of Neither For Nor Against LD - 719 An Act to Amend the Share of State Funding for the County Jail Operations Fund.

The regional and county jails have been flat funded for years. The Governor agreed to add a one-time increase of \$4,000,000 for State mandated medically assisted treatment (MAT) in the second half of the 131st, but for this upcoming biennial budget, we were again flat funded. When we collectively submitted the actual cost for these unfunded medical mandates, our shortfall was close to \$28,000,000. Governor Mills allocated an additional \$8,000,000 for the FY 26-27 budget. These are State-mandated services that will be paid for by Maine taxpayers.

When you compare the MDOC budget increases, approved by AFA, you'll find annual increases of up to 10% in the last two sessions. When scrutinizing the costs driving these increases, you'll find that payroll is the largest cost driver, followed closely by utilities, medical services, and food. Maine's regional and county jails are burdened with the same cost drivers, but there is no mechanism in place other than request an increase from the Maine Department of Corrections which we have done again this year through the Maine County Correctional Professional Standards Council.

Now I would like to discuss the make-up of the individuals in our regional and county jails. If you look at the classification for these incarcerated persons, you will find 85 – 90% are what we call pre-trial inmates. These are individuals who are waiting for their day in court. The elephant in the room is the undeniable fact that the State's court system is grossly overwhelmed and while we understand this factor, the financial impact of these numbers will be borne by the taxpayers that put you and me into office.

If a person is taken into custody and is suffering from mental sickness or substance use disorder, Maine jails will provide the resources to stabilize these individuals. We will continue to care for those who come into our facilities, however, if the State is unwilling to shoulder more of the fiscal impact, we will again be forced to look to our municipalities to fund our basic operations.

Taking the position of NFNA provides us the opportunity to ensure members of the committee are educated on why the jails perpetually ask the State for more funding. We also recognize that there are three jail funding bills facing this committee in this session. Maine sheriffs had already voted unanimously to support one of the other bills before this language was released, but it's imperative that you know we are not opposed to any funding source. If this committee chooses to support LD 719, we be grateful that some relief is in sight.

As members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, we trust you will recognize that Maine jails need your assistance in recalibrating how the State pays for county corrections. If you find LD 719 is the right path, Maine sheriffs will work together to ensure this bill moves forward, as we will with any bill that fairly allocates State funding for our jails.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.