



**OXFORD COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

26 Western Avenue ♦ P.O. Box 179 ♦ South Paris, ME 04281

(207) 743-6359 ♦ www.oxfordcounty.org

Timothy G. Turner, Chairman ♦ Lisa M. Keim ♦ H. Sawin Millett

Testimony of Sawin Millett, Oxford County Commissioner, in Support of

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

March 3, 2025

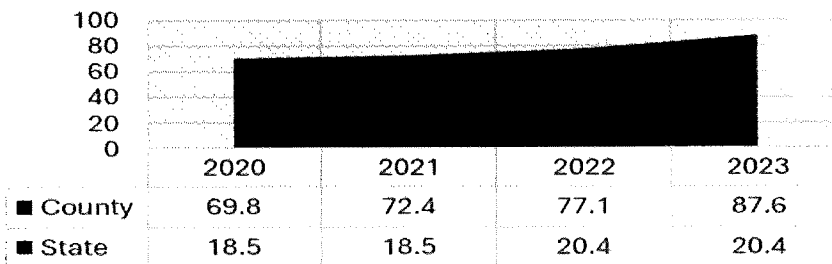
Chair Beebe-Center, Chair Hasenfus, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Sawin Millett, and I serve as a member of the board of commissioners for Oxford County. I appear before you today in support of LD 719.

You will hear from others on this bill, but it won't surprise you that I want to focus on the numbers as it relates to this bill.

Fundamentally, this bill is about property tax relief for Maine people. According to the numbers below, Maine state government has provided financial support for about 20% of the operating costs of county jails. In this year's biennial budget, the support would get as low as 17% in FY27. That means that, by 2027, local property taxpayers will be picking up 83% of the cost of county jail operations.

	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27
County Jail Operating Costs	\$90.6M	\$90.8M	\$97.6M	\$108M	\$115.5M	\$127.2M ¹	\$132.3M ²	\$137.6M ³
State Funding	\$18.5M	\$18.5M	\$20.4M	\$20.4M	\$20.4M	\$24.4M	\$24.4M	\$24.4M
State Funding %	20%	20%	20%	18%	17%	19%	18%	17%

**County Jail Funding Contribution in Millions
County vs. State**



The purpose of LD 719 is to have the State pick up its fair share of county jail funding so that local property taxpayers can get needed relief. If the state share goes up, the local share goes down.

¹ This figure is based on FY25 budget projections.

² This is an estimated figure based on a 4% increase from FY 25 operating costs.

³ This is an estimated figure based on a 4% increase from estimated FY 26 operating costs.

Now, some of you might ask, how do we know the local share will go down if the state share goes up. The answer is simple. Even if LD 719 were to pass and get funded, the county share would still be 65%, two-thirds of the cost of operating county jails. That is a level of local support that provides substantial motivation for counties to achieve efficiencies and keep costs down.

Let's also talk about whether the state budget can support a 35% share of county jail costs. The short answer is, in any given year, the state budget will support only what it can afford. If the budget can't afford 35%, the share will be adjusted down in that year. That is what happened for 20 years since Maine voters passed the law requiring 55% state support for local schools. When Maine's budget had the capacity to fund 55%, as was the case over the past several years, Maine funded schools at 55%. But prior to that, the budget reduced the support below 55%. The same thing can happen with LD 719, although we certainly hope and expect that the state would fully fund county jails.

Finally, as an elected official, I hear more about property taxes than any other tax in Maine. Property taxes are regressive. They literally hit people where they live. That's why the Oxford County Commission works as hard as it can to keep spending down, but even with this goal, the cost of operating our county jail went up \$2,025,617.00, or 61.5%, and the county jail represents a significant percentage of the Oxford County budget. So, we were forced to raise property taxes in Oxford County. Obviously, if we can pass legislation that helps relieve the burden of property taxes in Oxford County and the other 15 counties in Maine, even in a modest way as proposed in LD 719, we should do it.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 719. If you have any questions or need additional information, please let me know.