

Chairs Carney, Kuhn, and other distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Ronda Snyder. I am the Register of Probate for Kennebec County and a member of the Maine Registers of Probate Association. I am here today, along with my Deputy Register, Brielle Balmer to express our support for LD 505, An Act to Update Processes and Fees in the Probate Court System.

Currently, filing and other fees are paid by the user of our services, and that will continue to be the case when this legislation is passed. The Probate staff in all counties work diligently to ensure that the cases for county residents are processed as efficiently and quickly as possible. Cases, such as Formal Estates, often take many paralegal hours and regularly take years to finalize and close.

After the initial filing fees, the Probate Court receives minimal fees to process the remainder of the cases filed with us. If the same work was billed hourly for paralegal time at a law firm, the fees would be in the thousands for some cases. Increases between \$5 to \$150 are quite reasonable for the services offered. The higher-end fee of \$150 covers Petitions to Resolve a Disputed Claim and for Allowance and Petition for Order of Complete Settlement of Estate, two Petitions associated with Formal Estates. As mentioned above, these are the most work-intensive cases and often take years to settle.

It should be noted that the Court charges no fees in Guardianship cases where the Petitioner is deemed indigent.

Probate fees were last updated in 2021, a process that began before the rise in costs that governments, both large and small, have faced. The Surcharge Fees were last updated in 2017. Since then, there has been a significant increase in costs for materials necessary to handle cases effectively. Probate Courts generate very little revenue compared to their expenses, which include various budgeted line items such as Guardian Ad Litem and Visitor Appointments, Lease and Service Agreements, Postage, Publication costs, Office Supplies, Salaries, Payroll Taxes, and Benefits, among others.

Kennebec County is one of the busiest courts in Maine, with 932 cases opened in 2024. For example, in fiscal year 2024, the revenue for Kennebec's Probate Court was approximately \$287,000 while total expenses, many of which are listed above, amounted to approximately 654,000.

Updating our fee schedule to reflect the increase in operational expenses will relieve some of the tax burden on taxpayers in Kennebec and other counties. I encourage you to vote to pass. If you have any questions, please ask.