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**THE MAINE SENATE**  
132nd Legislature

**Testimony of Senator Nicole Grohoski**  
**In Support of LD 739, "An Act to Reimburse the City of Ellsworth**  
**for an Access Road to a New Court Facility in Hancock County"**

**Before the Committee on Judiciary**  
**10 March 2025**

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Nicole Grohoski, and I proudly represent Senate District 7, which includes 22 coastal communities in Downeast Maine, 21 of which are in Hancock County. Today, I am pleased to testify as a cosponsor in support of LD 739, "An Act to Reimburse the City of Ellsworth for an Access Road to a New Court Facility in Hancock County."

As our colleague Rep. White testified, Hancock County is in dire need of a new courthouse. Thank you to members of this committee and the full 131st Legislature who approved funding for a new courthouse for our county as well as consolidated courthouses in Androscoggin and Somerset Counties.

Today I am back with another funding request, albeit a much smaller one. This bill would reimburse the City of Ellsworth for the construction of a public road to access a property that our City Council and many residents prefer for the new courthouse. Specifically, the bill would authorize reimbursement of 50% of the costs incurred to build the road, not to exceed \$750,000. To be clear, the road would be a public road in the City of Ellsworth, not a road owned by the Judicial Branch, which is why they cannot bond for it.

Since we last met on the topic of a new Hancock County courthouse, a lot has transpired. After an extensive, multi-year search, the Judicial Branch purchased a piece of property that was a bit outside of our downtown and major commercial areas. Many folks who lived in that area objected, mainly due to traffic and other public safety concerns. The City and Judicial Branch began working together to see if any other options existed that might be more preferable for Ellsworth residents. The City identified a property with a willing seller off of High Street (US Route 1) and is now facilitating a land swap agreement with the Judicial Branch.

However, to develop this property, a road will need to be built across other properties. On January 7th, the Ellsworth City Council voted to move forward with funding for the road and continuing land swap negotiations. Rep. White and I agreed to pursue a state funding match to offset the full burden to Ellsworth property taxpayers of a road built primarily to serve residents of all of Hancock County (pop. ~56,000, compared to Ellsworth at ~9,000), which is why we are here today.

It has come to our attention that the Judicial Branch has concerns about how the bill was drafted and does not believe the reimbursement should be within their purview because this is a public road, not an access road that would be owned by the Judicial Branch. Perhaps the Department of Transportation or the Department of Administrative and Financial Services would be better suited to administer such a reimbursement. In light of this information, we could propose an amendment to clarify that the road would be a City road and another agency (to be confirmed) would administer the reimbursement.

Fundamentally, it is fair for the state to participate in a cost-share with the City of Ellsworth to build a road to a state-owned asset that serves the whole of Hancock County. I ask for your support of this bill and commit to working with Rep. White to address the drafting concerns raised by the Judicial Branch.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.