



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, Distinguished Colleagues on the State and Local Government Committee:

I am Will Tuell. I represent roughly two dozen small towns and unorganized territories in central and coastal Washington County, and am before you today to present LD 634, "Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Study the Reduction of Unfunded and Outdated Municipal and County Mandates."

I do so because municipalities and counties around the state have long complained about the number of mandates coming out of Augusta – mandates that are well intended, maybe even funded for several years, and ultimately forgotten when we move onto some other issue of concern.

Municipalities like the small towns I represent have skeleton crews wearing many hats and putting in long hours just to keep the town office open. Your clerk may be registering someone's vehicle, answering questions about property tax assessments, working with a code enforcement officer who is also the animal control officer and splitting time between several smaller towns, and preparing warrants for the selectmen or posting agendas for an all volunteer planning board.

While Maine Municipal Association does a wonderful job with legal services for their 490-ish members, that is more like urgent care than hands-on counsel that can help a town navigate the latest laws, regulations, and mandates out of Augusta. Trainings and workshops are fantastic as well, but again, sending a town staff member to even a Zoom training, much less a workshop here in Augusta, Bangor, or Portland, means the office will be closed or you'll have to find someone to fill in. Many small towns don't even have the option of being open more than one or two days a week, and there are still a few where work is done out of the clerk's house.

This strain is true even in larger town offices where municipalities have people with specialized tasks, but still lack the bandwidth to keep up with even the most inconsequential things that we pass.

Counties, especially those with dozens of unorganized territories where the commissioners act as the selectboard, also struggle with keeping up with mandates we pass on.

Even then, staffing is only one part of the problem. Every law we pass that involves municipal or county government comes with rules, and the cost of compliance ultimately falls on your 85-year-old neighbor struggling to keep up with property taxes, or that young family settling into their first home, or the lobster fisherman who is out hauling when the budget is being voted on at town meeting.

I want to say right here that most municipalities don't want to raise taxes, don't want to spend beyond their means, and feel helpless when a spate of new mandates comes down every summer and fall, mandates that are often arbitrary, conflicting, and hard to decipher by people who do not have the ability of simply walking next door to OPLA or a dedicated attorney on retainer.

Yet that is where towns large and small, where counties large and small, find themselves and why as we look at a range of property tax relief bills this session across all our committees, I reintroduced LD 634 despite several failed attempts in the past decade to make some headway.

Essentially, this bill sets up a study group of legislators, municipal and county officials to identify outdated and unnecessary mandates that affect local and regional governments of all sizes around the state.

Over the past few weeks I have been working with our wonderful analyst, Kristin, on fine tuning LD 634, recognizing a need for greater county involvement, and the need for communities of all sizes to be involved in the process.

Veterans of this committee will appreciate the fact that I have done so in advance of the public hearing and work session as we oftentimes get bogged down in the size and composition of such committees.

I believe Kristin and I were able to overhaul the original language while still keeping the intent of the bill so that, hopefully, we will not get bogged down during work session. I do realize fifteen members is robust, but I think we will benefit from having stakeholders take a comprehensive look at mandates that they can then bring back to us for review and possibly a targeted, thoughtful repeal over the next two years.

I am not a big fan of studies, but this one is long overdue as towns everywhere grapple with property taxes, staffing shortages, and policy implementation that ultimately falls on the back of the property taxpayer.

We are going to have some intense conversations about "property tax relief" but without reforming the underpinning of the system we are merely nibbling at the edges of a wider, deeper issue -- that we pass bills without really understanding the magnitude on the front line folks implementing the legislation we pass, or the rules we empower our state government to implement.

I'm going to close by paraphrasing a quote Maine Municipal's Rebecca Graham shared with us during orientation – if something is successful in Washington County, it can be successful anywhere. The towns in my district are small, hardscrabble, practical folks. This commission gives them, and folks like them all

around the state a seat at the table, an opportunity to identify what is working, what is doable, and where we can look to reduce red tape across the state.

I thank you for the opportunity and look forward to your questions and ideas. I also want to compliment Kristin again for her assistance in helping me organize, refine, and spruce up LD 634. I believe it will save us a good bit of time in the long run, and will be more in tune with the committee culture.

Thank you!

Sponsor: Representative Tuell
Drafted by: KKB
Date: 3/13/2025
New Title?: NO
Add Emergency?: NO

LD 634
Sponsor's proposed amendment

Amend the bill by striking everything after the title and inserting the following in its place:

Sec. 1. Commission established. Resolved: That the Commission to Study the Reduction of Unfunded and Outdated Municipal and County Mandates, referred to in this resolve as "the commission," is established.

Sec. 2. Commission membership. Resolved: That, notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, the commission consists of 15 members appointed as follows:

1. Two members of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate, including a member from each of the 2 parties holding the largest number of seats in the Legislature;
2. Two members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House, including a member from each of the 2 parties holding the largest number of seats in the Legislature;
3. One member representing the Governor's office as designated by the Governor;
4. A representative of a statewide association representing municipalities, appointed by the President of the Senate;
5. A representative of a statewide association representing town and city clerks, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
6. A representative of a statewide association representing county commissioners, appointed by the President of the Senate;
7. A representative of a county with 100,000 or more residents, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
8. A representative of a municipality with more than 20,000 residents, appointed by the President of the Senate;
9. Two representatives of municipalities with 10,001 to 20,000 residents, one appointed by the President of the Senate and one appointed by the Speaker of the House;
10. A representative of a municipality with 5,001 to 10,000 residents, appointed by the Speaker of the House; and

11. Two representatives of municipalities with 5,000 residents or less, one appointed by the President of the Senate and one appointed by the Speaker of the House.

Sec. 3. Chairs. Resolved: That the first-named Senate member is the Senate chair and the first-named House of Representatives member is the House chair of the commission.

Sec. 4. Appointments; convening of commission. Resolved: That all appointments must be made no later than 30 days following the effective date of this resolve. The appointing authorities shall notify the Executive Director of the Legislative Council once all appointments have been completed. After appointment of all members, the chairs shall call and convene the first meeting of the commission. If 30 days or more after the effective date of this resolve a majority of but not all appointments have been made, the chairs may request authority and the Legislative Council may grant authority for the commission to meet and conduct its business.

Sec. 5. Duties. Resolved: That the commission shall review unfunded and outdated municipal and county mandates in order to provide recommendations and to report out a list of mandates for the Legislature to consider eliminating or revising.

Sec. 6. Staff assistance. Resolved: That, the Legislative Council shall provide necessary staffing services to the commission, except that Legislative Council staff support is not authorized when the Legislature is in regular or special session.

Sec. 7. Interim report. Resolved: That, no later than December 3rd, 2025, the commission shall submit to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over state and local government matters an interim report that includes its findings and recommendations made in 2025, including suggested legislation. The joint standing committee may report out legislation related to the report to the Second Regular Session of the 132nd Legislature.

Sec. 8. Final report. Resolved: That, no later than November 4th, 2026, the commission shall submit a final report that includes its findings and recommendations made in 2026, including suggested legislation, not included in the interim report for presentation to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over state and local government matters. The joint standing committee may report out legislation related to the report to the 133rd Legislature in 2027.

SUMMARY

This resolve establishes the Commission to Study the Reduction of Unfunded and Outdated Municipal and County Mandates. The commission shall review unfunded and outdated municipal and county mandates in order to provide recommendations and to report out a list of mandates for the Legislature to consider eliminating or revising. By December 3rd, 2025, the commission shall submit to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over state and local government matters an interim report that includes its

findings and recommendations made in 2025, including suggested legislation. The joint standing committee may report out legislation related to the report to the Second Regular Session of the 132nd Legislature. By November 4th, 2026, the commission shall submit a final report that includes its findings and recommendations made in 2026, including suggested legislation, not included in the interim report for presentation to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over state and local government matters. The joint standing committee may report out legislation related to the report to the 133rd Legislature in 2027.