



Administrative Office of the Courts

P.O. Box 4820, Portland, Maine 04112-4820

Tel: (207) 822-0792 FAX: (207) 822-0781 TTY: (207) 822-0701

Julia Finn, Esq.
Legislative Analyst

Tel: (207) 822-0767
julia.finn@courts.maine.gov

Judicial Branch testimony in opposition to LD 1085, Resolve, Directing the Judicial Branch to Perform an Inspection and Study of the Rumford Courthouse Building:

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Julie Finn and I represent the Judicial Branch. I would like to provide the following testimony regarding this bill.

This resolve requires the Judicial Branch to perform an inspection and space study of the building that houses the Rumford District Court to determine the feasibility of making updates that would be necessary to resume jury trials in the building.

The courthouse building referred to in LD 1085 is not owned by the Judicial Branch. In fact, it is owned by the Town of Rumford and also houses the town administrative offices and the police department, although the police may be planning to vacate the building.

The Judicial Branch occupies many buildings, both owned and leased, throughout Maine. The Judicial Branch is constantly reviewing facilities needs across the state. The prioritization of projects is based on the overall operational needs statewide and the resources available to do the work. In addition, the Judicial Branch has been engaged in a long-term courthouse consolidation review to determine where efficiencies might be met through consolidation where it makes sense to do so, and through the renovation or replacement of outdated facilities.

Most recently, the 131st Legislature approved a bond last year to build or renovate in Ellsworth, Lewiston and Skowhegan in furtherance of the Judicial Branch's long-term plan. In the previous cycle of bonded projects, the Judicial Branch built or renovated in York County, Belfast and Oxford County. Part of our planning in Oxford County included centralizing jury operations as part of our expansion in South Paris and representations were made to an earlier Legislature in this regard. Resuming jury trials in Rumford has not been part of our planning process and is, in fact, contrary to it.

If the Town of Rumford or another entity wanted to move forward on evaluating the Rumford building, the challenges would be great and the costs high. With respect to adequate space for jury trials, some of the issues that need to be addressed are listed below.

There is:

- no secure circulation for jurors,
- no parking for jurors,
- an insufficient number of conference rooms for parties and interpreters during jury trial and for other court functions during a jury trial,
- inaccessible restroom facilities,
- insufficient space for selection to include private and confidential individual voir dire in a secure space (that is not chambers),
- insufficient space for jury deliberation,
- no dedicated holding area for in-custody defendants at the courthouse for trial,
- no secure attorney meeting room for in-custody defendants,,
- insufficient space in the clerk's office and courtroom to add more computers and video monitors for jury operations
- and an insufficient number of clerks to add jury operations in Rumford.

In addition, in 2022, an accessibility survey was completed for the Rumford District Court. This survey detected several primary and significant accessibility concerns related to parking, entrances, and restrooms. While some barriers may be able to be removed through alteration, some accessibility issues are nearly impossible to remediate with the available square footage, including but not limited to the slope of the ramp outside the courthouse (the slope is 4%, and the maximum slope should be 2%).

For all of these reasons, the Judicial Branch asks for an ought-not-to-pass vote on LD 1085.

Thank you for your consideration.