

Senator Baldacci and Representative Salisbury and esteemed members of the State and Local Government Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak today.

My name is Joanne Mason, I live in Readfield in Kennebec County.

I appreciate the opportunity to voice my concerns regarding the proposal to increase the number of Kennebec County commissioners. While I fully support effective governance and representation, I believe increasing the number of commissioners is unnecessary and could lead to inefficiencies rather than improvements.

First and foremost; expanding the commission would bring additional and unnecessary costs to taxpayers. Stipends, insurance and other administrative expenses such as the possible need to increase office staff to support those positions, places a great financial burden on residents without clear justification for the actual need. In an already difficult budget season, we need to be good stewards of the money given to the counties by the taxpayers and not shake things up because someone thinks more politicians would be better. Instead of making changes to Kennebec let's focus on paying for unfunded State mandated programs already in place that have created budget increases that all Counties are struggling with.

Additionally, a larger commission does not guarantee better decision-making. More voices at the table may lead to unnecessary and prolonged debates and potential gridlock, slowing the progress of important county initiatives already being discussed and implemented. Instead of adding more commissioners, we should focus on improving the effectiveness of the current governing body by supporting them with good legislation.

Furthermore, I worry about the potential for diluted accountability. With more officials sharing responsibilities, it may become harder for constituents to track decision-making and hold individual members accountable for their actions as we saw with our much larger budget committee. A streamlined commission ensures that every representative remains directly engaged with their district and clearly accountable for their decisions.

I urge you to prioritize fiscal responsibility, efficiency, and accountability by maintaining the current number of county commissioners. Investing in better governance practices, community engagement, and accessibility will be far more effective than simply adding more seats to the commission.

Thank you for considering my perspective, and I encourage you to continue to support a government that is both responsible, effective and efficient.

Thank you.