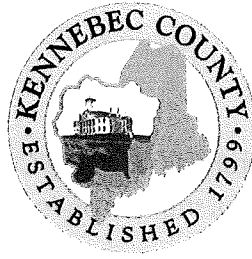


Joe Pietroski
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**In Support of LD 1884," A RESOLVE, TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF
KENNEBEC COUNTY COMMISSIONERS"**

May 12, 2025

The State and Local Government Committee:

Good morning, Senate Chair Senator Joseph Baldacci, House Chair Representative Suzanne Salisbury, and all Honorable Members of the State and Local Government Committee. Thank you for your attention and time this morning to express my support for LDs 1884 and 1556.

I am a 50 year plus resident of Winthrop, Maine with a Downeaster accent that I learned growing up in my home town, Rockland, Maine. Presently I am honored to be serving my first term as Kennebec County's District #2 County Commissioner, representing 14 communities with nearly 40,000 citizens from Vienna, Maine on the Franklin County border and Pittston, Maine on the Lincoln County border.

I come today to ask you to support the process, including a County Referendum, to allow the number of Kennebec County Commissioners to increase from 3 to 5 members.

It pleases me that so many Kennebec communities support this increase. The number of advantages that are cited range from better management, increased communication, more involvement in the research behind decisions, more time to engage with my communities and the rest of the county, and to have more time to focus on the overwhelming change that is occurring going from a relatively quiet operation to a vigorous and necessary multi-million dollars supported service, safety, and disaster preparations operation.

This request is neither a new idea nor the final request. York, Cumberland, Somerset and Franklin counties, have already completed increasing their number of Commissioners, and others are currently considering.

For reference Kennebec County's budget in fiscal year 26 for its 7 departments including Administration will exceed \$25,500,000, with \$20,700,000 needed from local county property taxes. Just a few years ago, the budget was in the mid-teens. This year's budget increased by over \$2,227,000. Laws and practices have changed greatly along with the

District 2:

Farmingdale, Fayette, Gardiner, Hallowell, Litchfield, Monmouth, Mount Vernon, Pittston, Randolph, Readfield, Vienna, Wayne, West Gardiner, Winthrop

necessity of more inspection and awareness from the Commissioners, something that several community leaders have cited as the reason for their support,

In the interest of time, the one issue that above all else convinced me to seek the introduction of this Resolve, is the impact of the rules regarding discussing county business with my fellow commissioners. As the new Commissioner at the front of the room, and it seems like historically for me always serving on public committees of 5 or more, I have found it a very difficult change to not be able to discuss any county issues outside of a formal session with my colleagues.

Kennebec County's outside attorney also called attention to this in a letter to the Commissioners earlier this year. Communication is more difficult with just three on a committee, because technically when 2 commissioners talk outside a formal meeting, just having two together is a quorum, thus a violation has occurred, in addition to not getting explanations, prohibiting most questions about aspects of county government so you are unable to receive an answer, or banning an exchange of thoughts about any item coming up for discussion related to the budget. This does not happen when 5 or more are on the public committee.

Many of you are aware of the tremendous number of local towns and school committees that have made this change from 2 to 5 or more in the past few years. I also believe that having more individuals serve is an advantage. As one of my town managers said to me, "I have served in towns with both, and that there is no question that the process runs smoother when the committee has at least 5 members."

I have used up my time allotted and thank you for your attention. I wish to acknowledge the support of so many legislators for this legislation and the sponsorships from Rep. Greenwood, and Rep. Collins. I welcome any questions or comments at this time or can be reached easily at the following home numbers.

Sincerely,

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