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Judicial Branch testimony in favor of LD 1997, An Act to Authorize Issuance of Securities to Modernize and Consolidate Certain Court Facilities:

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 some brief testimony in support of Judicial Branch bill LD 1997.

Some of you will remember that last session this Committee passed out LD 924, a bill that amended 4 MRSA § 1610-I. This was the Maine Governmental Facilities Authority ("MGFA") bond authorized by the Legislature several years ago to allow us to build new court facilities in Belfast, South Paris and Biddeford. LD 924 allowed us to take any extra funds from that bond to use toward other courthouse projects, especially in Newport. Unfortunately, there ended up being no extra bond funds available under that bond, so LD 924 did not help us to fund any additional projects.

With the assistance of Senator Haggan, the Judicial Branch has introduced this bill, LD 1997, which amends 4 MRSA § 1610-Q. This is the statutory section that authorized MGFA to issue a bond for new courthouse facilities in Ellsworth, Skowhegan and Lewiston. To the extent that there are excess funds available from this bond, we are asking that the language of the statutory section be modified so that we can use these excess funds for additional courthouse projects, including re-establishing a court location in Newport.

The courthouses listed in the original bond will receive full and priority funding. However, allowing the Maine Judicial Branch to use any excess funding to support courthouse projects like Newport would be helpful in providing a mechanism to more efficiently and effectively address facilities issues at our courthouses.

This bill will not have a fiscal note. There is no general fund money involved. The debt service is already funded in the budget; it will not increase.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.