

To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
From: **Commissioner Andre Cushing**, President,
Maine County Commissioners Association (MCCA)
Date: February 23, 2026
Subject: The Value of County-Led Collaborative Services

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee and Senator Beebe-Senter, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Andre Cushing, and I serve as a Penobscot County Commissioner and President of the Maine County Commissioners Association.

I am here to highlight how Maine's counties are evolving into important **regional service hubs**. By providing collaborative programs, we allow municipalities to share costs and increase professional standards, ultimately reducing the burden on local property taxpayers.

Cumberland County: A Model for Assessing

Cumberland County provides a premier example of how counties professionalize local government functions.

- **Regional Assessing:** The Cumberland County Assessing Department allows municipalities to contract for full-time, professional assessing services. For example, the Town of Casco recently entered into a contract with the county to maintain high-level service that a small town might otherwise struggle to recruit for independently.
- **Scale of Service:** Their Regional Communications Center serves as the 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) for 19 of the 28 communities in the county, demonstrating a massive scale of shared infrastructure.

Penobscot County: Pioneering Regional Fire & EMS

In Penobscot County, we are leading the state in addressing the critical EMS staffing crisis.

- **First Regional District:** We helped facilitate the formation of the Central Maine Highlands Fire & EMS District #1, the first of its kind in Maine. This district serves eight towns and two townships by pooling resources into

a single sustainable service hub. This effort is continuing to evolve in three more regions of our county

- **Financial Impact:** These collaborations offer massive fiscal benefits. By moving away from independent municipal departments, towns can reduce redundancy in administration and equipment. Instead of each town losing \$150 to \$1,800 per ambulance call, the regional district maximizes federal and state supplemental funding to stabilize costs.
- **Efficiency:** We also provide regional animal control for numerous municipalities, ensuring even the most remote residents have access to certified animal welfare enforcement without the town needing to manage an independent department.

The Fiscal Reality

These efforts are the definition of efficiency, but as we take on more municipal-style services, the pressure on the county tax levy increases. The benefits of this collaboration is overshadowed by the dysfunctional funding of county jails. The statutory changes in the jail consolidation legislation created a cap on property taxes. It left counties dependent on the state to fund the gap. This supplemental funding has not happened in the last five years leaving many counties to cover this shortfall. As you have read this has now become unsustainable. If you also review the recent report from the Jail Standards Council from LD 719 you will see the real impacts driving this need. We ask for your support in stabilizing county funding to ensure we can keep these regional programs affordable for our towns.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to all levels of Maine government.