

ANDROSCOGGIN COUNTY

COMMISSIONERS

Sally Christner, Commissioner
Jane Penthany, Vice-Chair
Shukri Abdiraham, Commissioner
Roland Poirier, Commissioner
Brian Ames, Commissioner
Garrett Mason, Commissioner
Andrew Lewis, Chair



COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Jeff Chute
Androscoggin County
2 Turner Street
Auburn, ME 04210
Tel. No. (207) 753-2500
Fax No. (207) 782-5367

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Joint standing committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs my name is Jeff Chute. I am currently the County Administrator for Androscoggin County and a former Jail Administrator, I am speaking to you today to emphasize the urgent need for increased and sustainable state funding for our county jails. The financial pressures we face in Androscoggin County due to jail funding are real, growing, and increasingly untenable.

Key Financial Realities

o Annual Operating Deficit

The Androscoggin County Jail's lack of state funding is forcing the county to carry a budget deficit of **\$1.2 million**. The costs are related to overcrowding, operational costs, increased contract costs, and inmate boarding. Each year, the county must cover a significant shortfall just to maintain basic operations.

2. State Funding Stagnation

- The State's contribution to our jail has remained mostly flat for at least four years.
- Unfunded mandates from new jail standards, additional training requirements, and new laws are creating a significant strain on county resources.

3. Overcrowding and Boarding Costs

- Our jail is rated at one hundred and sixty beds but routinely houses over two hundred inmates.
- Due to overcrowding, we are required by Maine **Jail Standards** to board inmates in other county jails. In the 2026 budget, we project an additional **\$700,000** for boarding costs alone.
- State facilities continue to accept **State sentenced** inmates. on one or two days per week burdening overcrowded jails to house these prisoners.

4. Use of Reserves

- To cover the end-of-year deficit, the County Commission continues to tap our undesignated fund balance.
- This is not a sustainable long-term strategy; our reserves are being drained to fill a structural funding gap created by the state.

5. Rising Tax Impact

- The 2026 proposed county budget is \$23.7 million, with \$11.3 million allocated to the jail.
- After accounting for anticipated revenue, the county must raise \$17.1 million via property taxes, representing a 12.5% increase over current levels.
- A substantial portion of this tax increase directly supports the underfunded jail system.

Why This Matters

- **Public Safety:** Adequate funding is essential to maintain safe staffing levels, meet growing capital needs and meet rising operational costs.
 - **Legal Compliance:** Counties must meet Maine Jail Standards and other statutory obligations, which are difficult on limited funding.
 - **Fairness:** Counties like ours disproportionately absorb the burden; this is not sustainable or an equitable model.
-

What We Are Asking

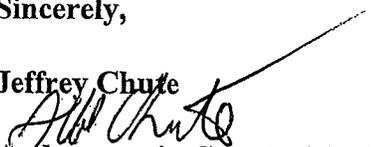
- Increase the state allocation for the County Jail Operations Fund so that payments more closely reflect actual costs.
 - Consider a funding formula that scales with county jail expenditures, including boarding costs, so counties are not penalized when relying on other facilities.
 - Allow counties to board inmates in state facilities, particularly those serving state sentences (e.g., probation violations), to reduce overcrowding and save on boarding fees.
 - Commit to a multi-year funding agreement to allow counties to plan and budget effectively.
-

As someone who has operated a jail and now oversees county governance, I can say with confidence that Androscoggin County is doing everything within its means. Yet the current model forces us to burn through reserves and raise property taxes — all problematic for the citizens we serve.

I strongly urge the Legislature to act — not only to relieve burdens on counties like Androscoggin, but to uphold public safety and preserve the integrity of Maine's Jails.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Chute


Androscoggin County Administrator