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THE MAINE SENATE
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Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony in Support of LD2232 – “An Act to Increase County Jail Funding”

Good afternoon, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. I am here to testify in support of LD2232 – “*An Act to Increase County Jail Funding*”.

This bill addresses a growing and unsustainable imbalance in how we fund county jail operations in Maine. For years, state funding for our county jails has remained largely stagnant, while the cost of operating those facilities has continued to rise significantly. As a result, counties have been forced to make up the difference—placing an increasing burden on local property taxpayers.

The bill makes several important and necessary changes:

First, it increases the base funding for the County Jail Operations Fund from \$20.3 million to \$28.3 million beginning July 1, 2026, and establishes a modest but critical 4% annual adjustment moving forward. This provision recognizes a simple reality: costs do not stand still. Without a predictable funding mechanism that keeps pace with inflation and operational demands, counties will continue to fall behind.

Second, the bill provides an additional \$5 million in dedicated funding for community corrections programs, including pretrial supervision, alternative sentencing, and electronic monitoring. These programs are not only cost-effective, they are essential tools for improving public safety outcomes. By supporting alternatives to incarceration where appropriate, we can reduce jail populations, improve rehabilitation outcomes, and ensure that limited correctional resources are used where they are most needed.

Third, the bill refines the funding distribution formula to rely on the most recent prior fiscal year with complete data. This is a practical and commonsense adjustment that will improve predictability and fairness in how funds are allocated among counties. Taken together, these changes represent a thoughtful, data-informed approach to strengthening Maine’s correctional system. They support both the operational needs of our county jails and the broader goal of a more effective and efficient justice

system.

To give you an example, in Washington County our “rated capacity” in our jail is 42 (available long-term beds). In 2024/25 our Average Daily Population (ADP) was 45. To date from July 1st, 2025, which is the data used for current funding, our ADP is 59 (thanks to the limited 21 “Judge Days”/per year; however, that’s another issue in itself). The cost of housing “residents” continues to rise as well as the numbers of “residents” without any increase in reimbursement from the State. Coupled with the cost of health care services, including substance use disorder treatments, we continue to see costs rise. The Jail itself results in 30% of the overall County Budget, passing the costs onto the County Taxpayers.

It is important to emphasize this is not simply a county issue, it is a statewide responsibility. County jails serve a critical function within Maine’s unified correctional system. When the State does not meet its share of that responsibility, the impact is felt directly by local taxpayers and, ultimately, by the safety and well-being of our communities.

Finally, the emergency preamble underscores the urgency of this issue. Counties, similar to Washington County, are already feeling the strain. Without timely action, these challenges will only intensify in the coming fiscal year.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to support LD2232 and advance this important legislation.

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