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AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002  
(207) 287-1440  
TTY: (207) 287-4469

**Tiffany Strout**

12 Anderson Lane  
Harrington, ME 04643  
Home Phone: (207) 598-7043  
[Tiffany.Strout@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Tiffany.Strout@legislature.maine.gov)

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Testimony in support of

**LD 2232 – An Act to Increase County Jail Funding**

Good Afternoon, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. I am Representative Tiffany Strout from Harrington, representing the towns of Milbridge, Harrington, Columbia, Columbia Falls, Centerville, Addison, Jonesport, Beals, Jonesboro, Roque Bluffs, Whitneyville and Machias in beautiful Washington County and I am here today to testify in support of LD 2232 – **An Act to Increase County Jail Funding.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of LD 2232, a bill that will help to endure residents of a county jail are cared for and will help to relieve some of the property tax burden locally.

It is unfortunate to have to ask for additional funding for jails as I would rather see additional funding go into schools and education to provide opportunities for individuals so hopefully people do not have to spend time in a county jail. However, that is not currently where we are in our society today.

With the lack of mental health facilities, the drug epidemic and seasonal work, Washington County has been struggling to keep up with all of the funding needed to keep the county operational. Mismanagement of county taxpayer funds for several years put Washington County in a position where they were almost not able to pay their TAN back to the bank. This required an immediate tax increase on those who pay property tax to make sure our jails, courthouses, dispatch and Sheriff's office all stayed functioning and able to protect the citizens.

Being a member of the Washington County Budget Committee, I was able to see firsthand the exorbitant cost associated with running the jail. When looking further into the expenses, the driving contributor seems to be the medical costs. I understand medical coverage falls under the Federal Government guidelines which means once you enter the jail, you lose all of your medical coverage but does not mean you are cured from all of your medical needs, and in fact, some receive medical assistance that they would not otherwise have received if they had not gone to the jail. These costs are then passed on to the local taxpayers to cover.

The State providing funding to the county jails helps to offset the mandated medical cost coverage as well as needed maintenance for the county jails as they age.

Funding the jail is a small part of a larger problem that should be looked at. There needs to be more funding for mental health and treatment centers, more judges to process individuals so they do not spend any more time in jail than mandated by their crime and sentences. There needs to be more opportunities for education and opportunities for people to succeed. As all these issues continue to be worked on, the state providing funding, which I do understand is also taxpayer funds, helps to alleviate some financial stress on the property taxpayers which are often retired and on a fixed income and already having to make tough decisions to purchase medicines and keep their homes.

Thank you for your time today and I would be glad to answer any questions.

District 11 Addison, Beals, Columbia, Columbia Falls, Harrington, Jonesboro, Jonesport, Machias, Milbridge, Roque Bluffs, Whitneyville, Centerville Township, and North Washington (Part)