



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Senator Beebe Center, Representative Hassenfus, Distinguished Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Will Tuell. I represent nearly two dozen small towns and villages in Central Washington County today who are plagued by soaring property values and small tax bases with low or fixed incomes. Put simply, many of my constituents in House District 10 are living on Social Security, a pension, from paycheck to paycheck, and can't take any more costs being pushed down to their county or their towns.

That is why I am here today in support of LD 2232.

You all have seen the news about Washington County's fiscal crisis; I and my colleagues in the county's delegation have lived it firsthand for months and have seen how debates over finances have torn families, employees, the county, and our communities apart.

We all want the best for our small, rural county, and we all want to be part of the healing process.

Part of that process is understanding just how much mandated increases in services at small county jails like ours force county budgeters to increase spending and pass those costs on to the people all of us who represent Washington County here in the Legislature serve.

The issue of county jail funding is not a new one, and Washington County is not alone in dealing with it.

But we are the extreme case of what will happen if counties can't function, if costs Augusta passes on to the counties continue to grow unabated.

And so I am here today asking you to support this badly needed funding in hopes that it will allow counties to provide the services the Legislature has mandated counties provide, and to do so without further burdening the grandmother on Social Security or the retired veteran who just wanted to live quietly and peacefully in the woods. I ask you to do it for the lobsterman who

has seen the value of his catch decline, or the kid coming out of school looking to build a little house on land his or her family has owned for generations.

And I ask you to consider that Washington County is not alone. Waldo and Penobscott counties are also in dire straits financially due to the high costs of county corrections. Others may not be grabbing the headlines, but this funding will help each county from passing on even higher property taxes to their towns and residents.

Before I close, I want to share with you something our county manager sent along to our delegation last week. We need more court days Down East. More court days means defendants get their day in court faster and spend less time in jail waiting for their case to be heard and sentences to be handed down.

That means less overhead for our county jails, and helps both the justice system, the county boarding inmates, and the taxpayer alike.

I realize that is not this bill, but would be remiss if I didn't pass along our county's request before you as I know there is much collaboration between yours and the Judiciary Committee.

I thank you for hearing me out, for listening to a cry for help, and ask that you do right by our counties and municipalities that are struggling under the weight of county correctional costs.

Thank you,