



February 9, 2022

Sen. Anne Carney, Chair  
Rep. Thom Harnett, Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary  
Maine State Legislature  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: ***LD 1924 An Act To Expand Access to Justice in Rural Maine through Legal Education***

Dear Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Brennan, and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Maine State Bar Association, we submit this letter in support of LD 1924. We believe this proposed pilot project would help expand legal education and practice in Aroostook County, where access to counsel is limited.

**About us.** The Maine State Bar Association is a statewide trade association chartered in 1891 by the Maine Legislature. The Association currently represents approximately 3000 attorneys in the State in both public service and private practice. The Association maintains 28 separate sections covering nearly every field of law practiced in Maine, from Administrative Law to Workers' Compensation Law.

**Discussion.** This legislation would enable the University of Maine System to establish a satellite clinic of the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic of the University of Maine School of Law in Aroostook County as a 3-year pilot project. This pilot project would expand access to free legal aid services for people in need in Aroostook County. The project will also help address the rural attorney workforce shortage by exposing students to rural practice so they will be more likely to return to live and work in rural areas after their Maine Law graduation.

Maine's rural areas, including Aroostook County, need more lawyers. In recent years, the number of lawyers serving rural areas in Maine has dipped significantly. This reflects the "graying" of Maine's Bar, and the challenge of attracting and retaining professionals—including lawyers—in many of Maine's rural communities.

Because of the shortage of lawyers in rural Maine, the Maine State Bar Association elevated this issue to become a cornerstone of the organization's current strategic plan. The Association's "rural practice initiative" is supported by a subcommittee charged with developing resources to:

- Help new lawyers starting and retiring lawyers exiting rural practice;
- Use message boards to facilitate conversations between retiring and incoming lawyers;
- Explore legislative avenues for either direct aid or loan forgiveness.

LD 1924 fits well within these strategic objectives.

According to the 2018 Annual Report of the Board of Overseers of the Maine Bar, the most recent report available, there were a total of 215 attorneys in Aroostook County. The age breakdown of these attorneys was as follows:

- Age 65+ – 25%
- Age 50-64 – 27%
- Age 35-49 – 36%
- Under age 35 – 12%

To further illustrate the "graying" of the Maine Bar, we have included information below showing the age distribution of our Association's membership as of 2021 (with respect to members for whom we have data).

**Maine State Bar Association Membership Data (2021)**  
**Age of Members – Number of Attorneys**

- ≤ 29 – 109
- 30-39 – 419
- 40-49 – 467
- 50-59 – 527
- 60-69 – 685
- 70+ – 460

If this trend continues, we can expect further erosion in the number of lawyers in rural areas, and as a consequence, a decline in the ability of Maine people to receive the civil and criminal legal services they need. This includes a reduction in access to basic legal services like wills and trusts, real estate closings, dispute resolution, criminal defense, and family law – the types of services that are essential to life in Maine and everywhere else in this country. Fewer lawyers in rural areas also means fewer lawyers willing or able to take on services to indigent residents on a reduced cost or pro bono basis.

**Conclusion.** In closing, access to legal services in rural areas in Maine is a significant challenge that our State must confront. We appreciate the sponsor bringing this legislation forward, and we hope this proposed pilot project can help us address this challenge moving forward.

**MSBA Letter re LD 1924**  
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Frank Bishop', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Frank Bishop  
President, Board of Governors

cc: Angela Armstrong, Executive Director  
Rachel Okun, Chair, MSBA Legislative Committee  
James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP  
Clara McConnell, Verrill Dana, LLP