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LD 1009, Resolve, To Create A Health Care Ombudsman Position To Serve In Maine's County Jails

April 7, 2021

Chair Claxton, Chair Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, and my name is Stephen Gorden and, in addition to serving as chair of the board of commissioners for Cumberland County, I am writing today in my role as board president of the Maine County Commissioners Association. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee **neither for nor against** LD 1009.

About MCCA. Briefly, the Maine County Commissioners Association was established in 1890 to assist Maine's county government in providing vital services to Maine citizens in a responsive, efficient, and credible manner. The Association is based in Augusta and currently represents 15 of Maine's 16 counties and is governed by a board with representation from each participating county.

About LD 1009. This bill is a resolve directing the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to designate an ombudsman to help coordinate the health care needs of inmates in county jails, and in particular, to connect them with services for which they qualify. Currently, county jail inmates receive services from DHHS case managers who help inmates receive healthcare services, and these case managers are very helpful to inmates. To the extent this bill will result in additional services for inmates through DHHS, we are supportive. We are particularly supportive of this legislation to the extent the ombudsman may help inmates connect with resources available from outside the jail that might not otherwise have been provided. This could help improve the care of inmates, and help moderate the cost of healthcare for inmates that is otherwise falling on county taxpayers.

Amendment to bill needed. Importantly, there is language in the bill that needs to be fixed if the bill is to move forward. In particular, county jails are responsible for the oversight of inmates, including their healthcare needs. However, the language of the resolve currently states that the DHHS ombudsman would "oversee county jail inmates with medical and mental health needs and connect them to the health care services for which they qualify." This would create a legal conflict with the responsibility of county jails. To correct this issue, we would recommend that the language be

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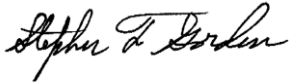
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modified to state that the ombudsman would “monitor” county jail inmates with medical and mental health care needs.”

Study group. In the event the Committee determines that the issues raised in this bill should become the subject of a study group, MCCA would support such an approach. However, if such a study does proceed, we believe it is important that a representative from “an association representing Maine county commissioners” be included as a member of the work group. We think this is important given that county commissioners serve as the financial stewards for county government, including the operation of county jails.

Conclusion. If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen T. Gordon".

Stephen Gordon
President

cc: Commissioner Brian Hobart, Chair, MCCA Legislative Committee
James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP, MCCA Legislative Counsel