

Christopher M. Gardner
220 King Street
Edmunds Township, Maine 04628
(207) 598-8704

TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

April 28, 2025

Chair: Senator Joseph Baldacci

Chair: Representative Suzanne Salisbury

Committee Clerk: Molly Sweet

LD 1542 An Act to Amend the Membership of the Washington County Budget Advisory Committee

Dear committee members and respective chairs, please allow me to introduce myself as Christopher Gardner, former longtime Chairman of the Washington County Commissioners, a position I held from 2005 through December of 2024. This past election cycle I made the difficult decision to not run for re-election after 20 years of service.

As one can imagine, in my many years as County Commissioner I was deeply involved in the budget process for Washington County and can speak with some knowledge on the budget committee and its budget process. Adding to that is the fact that I am also a lifelong resident of the Washington County Unorganized Territories in Edmunds Township. It was in these two capacities that I reached out to Senator Moore in favor of the changes being proposed in LD1542, most specifically around the UT representation on the committee.

What some do not realize is that the Unorganized Territories are the single biggest county taxpaying entity in Washington County year after year. Despite this however, where other municipalities, both large and small, have the opportunity to seek a direct municipal representative on the budget committee, the Unorganized Territories do not. This is due to the fact that the municipal government entity for the UT's are by statute the County Commissioners, who do not serve directly on the committee.

In my role as County Commissioner representing Washington County's 2nd District, I represented some of the most populated of the County UT's. Although I did my best to objectively represent the UT interests in the budget process, one could argue that the duality of the role as both municipal representative of the UTs and also as a County Commissioner for the District as whole, was somewhat of a conflict of interest. Seeing that as a Commissioner I had responsibility to the operational needs of the County and as such had to temper that balance that with the tax considerations and service needs of the UT residents.

For instance, when law enforcement spending was highly debated in years past, in my role in budget discussions, if I were to advocate for higher or lower spending, was that for the "County" or was that in consideration of what the UT resident's saw as the needs the territories face? I was fortunate that my long standing and well-known position as a UT resident and Commissioner allowed me to navigate those fine lines, but it always remained a point of conflict.

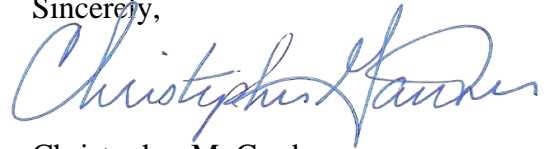
Senator Moore's bill allows that to be simplified. For matters of the budget process, the UT's as a whole should have the right to be represented at the same level of any other municipal entity of Washington County as laid out in LD1542.

Christopher M. Gardner
220 King Street
Edmunds Township, Maine 04628
(207) 598-8704

Coupling this with the fact that this additional member of the committee would allow the “numbers to work” in that the County Delegation representative can be returned once again to its rightful place as a voting member. This by way of bringing the total budget committee voting membership to 11 and thusly keeping it at an odd number for instances of avoiding “tie votes” on matters. This odd number issue has been seen as important in previous legislation around this budget committee.

As I close, I will say that although I no longer officially represent the people of Washington County, my record of multiple elections, with the last three being unopposed, with humility I would like to believe I have always been known to have a good sense of what the people of Washington County would be supportive of. It is with this experience, and in my capacity as a lifelong UT resident, that I would encourage the committee to offer LD1542 its fullest support.

Sincerely,



Christopher M. Gardner
(Former) Washington County Commissioner
District 2