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Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Rep Salisbury, and members of the Committee. I am Representative Bill Pluecker, representing House District 44, made up of Warren, Hope, and Union. I appreciate the opportunity to present to you LD 2158, “An Act to Address Vacancies on the Knox County Budget Committee.”

Knox County’s Budget Committee, requiring five members for a quorum, currently has only four seated members. The remaining five seats stand vacant following the November 2024 election, which produced no candidates from odd-numbered districts. Without a quorum, the Committee cannot legally convene—and critically, cannot fill its own vacancies. We are trapped in a legal deadlock our Charter never anticipated.

This isn't merely procedural. Knox County cannot adopt a 2026 budget, amend the current budget, or plan for 2027. We face indefinite interim budget operations, threatening essential services including public safety for our 18 municipalities. These municipalities depend on timely tax assessments to prepare their own budgets—we risk cascading fiscal instability across our entire county.

Four qualified residents, nominated by their municipal officers, are ready to serve. However, our Commissioners lack authority to appoint them. LD 2159 provides that temporary authority while respecting local input through municipal nominations.

This bill is carefully crafted. It expires April 1, 2029, giving Knox County time to amend our Charter while protecting against a recurrence in the 2028 election cycle. The emergency preamble is essential—our municipalities need immediate clarity for budget planning.

The Office of the Maine Attorney General confirms our legal predicament. LD 2158 offers the only viable path forward, restoring representative democracy and fiscal stability. Without it, Knox County cannot fulfill its fundamental obligation to its citizens.

I urge this Committee's support for LD 2159. Thank you.