



# MAINE COUNTY COMMISSIONS ASSOCIATION



Greetings county colleagues,

As we finish 2025 It is helpful to look back on our activities and accomplishments so we can measure progress and create a set of objectives for 2026.

As your president I had established some key goals for 2025;

- Improving our relationships with partner organizations (MSA, MACCAM, MMA, and other county departments)
- Seeking opportunities to collaborate with municipal and county partners to assist in delivering services to our residents.



AROOSTOOK COUNTY COMMISSION

• I committed to attend each counties meetings and to engage with partner organizations. This allowed me to learn more about the operations of counties and to build stronger relations. I was able to join each of your commission meetings at least once, to attend county partner meetings and to engage with our administrators and sheriffs in a productive manner. This included having many of you join us at joint meetings for MACCAM & MSA.



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We also strengthened our shared information on legislative priorities, built a more coordinated message to the legislature and saw the Jail Standards Council improve our communications with Maine DOC. Many thanks to those of you who helped in crafting these messaging pieces, attending LPC meetings and providing testimony and advocacy with your legislators. Special thanks to LPC co-chairs Comm Steve Gorden & Jean Marie Caterina for your work with our lobbying team at Verrill. Great appreciation to Tim Curtis, Scott Ferguson, Sawin Millett and Steve Gorden in particular for your tremendous amount of time and dedication to this part of the process. As a note Waldo County Comm Kevin Kelly has stepped in to co-chair in 2026 replacing Comm Steve Gorden.

In 2025 we saw significant change in county representations, over one third of our commissioners were new to office, several more changes took place in Washington, Somerset and Piscataquis Counties. We also saw several long-time county department heads and administrators change or depart. We took time to recognize those who left county government and honor a few who departed this life.

We also welcomed the participation and support of many county partners who work tirelessly to assure we provide our services to the public.



Many counties who still operate on calendar year (7 at this point still do) saw a difficult budget process. In some case, changes in their finance departments exposed long standing challenges with completing audits and establishing longer term financial policies and internal tracking that manifested in significant budget increases. Challenges with budget committee reviews and unrest among many town and city officials added to the mix. The pressure to provide required services, to maintain appropriate staffing levels and retain employees has created challenges for all levels of local government. This is compounded by the increasing costs of jail operations and the limited sources from which county revenue flows, and has reached a tipping point and calls for stronger response. This further shows the importance our county organization working more closely with partners at the local municipal level and improving our advocacy with legislators. At a time in which the state is seeing record revenues and surpluses, county government must advocate for relief to our operations and hence to the property taxpayer. Jail funding is a core part of these challenges, and this calls for immediate and strong steps. We have been coordinating with MMA and other affected groups to address the question of mandated services and ways to establish the state responsibility to appropriately fund these associated costs. At the same time we are seeking solutions between county and local government to find better options to deliver these services.



We saw 2025 as the year to step back into in-person events and to step up training and informational programs. We held five in person meetings as follows;

January's annual meeting, April's meeting hosted in Penobscot County, July's meeting hosted by Franklin County, September's convention hosted by Sagadahoc County, December's meeting hosted in Lincoln County at the Two Bridges Regional Jail. These events allowed for personal interaction, sharing of best practices, learning opportunities with speakers on strategic planning, Maine's new PFML law, cybersecurity, examples of collaborative efforts in the public safety sector, presentation on the county risk pool and tours of the new Franklin County EOC and Two Bridges Jail.



Our annual Convention of Maine Counties saw a rebounding number of attendees and a full slate of panel presentations, fun times for socializing and a great set of exhibitors and sponsors which resulted in record income from convention. We added a golf tournament which was well received and a silent auction that added to the fun. Many thanks to those who served on the events committee, helped with arrangements and hosted our event at a beautiful location. We are already planning for 2026 & 2027 and hope to secure meeting locations by the time of our annual meeting.



I feel communication is the key so I restarted our newsletter which will continue in 2026 on a bi-monthly basis. I also look forward to visiting your counties again and we are planning our in-person events for the year. We hope to visit several more counties and see the great things you offer.

Our relationship with the National Association of Counties (NACo) was improved with our state board members Somerset County Comm Robert Sezak and Kennebec County Comm George Jabar attending along with myself and a few administrators joining us for both the February Legislative Conference in Washington DC and Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, PA., which happens to be NACo's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We also welcomed NACo CEO & Executive Director Matt Chase to our Convention of Counties.



As we close the year and look forward to the next, I want to share my personal thanks and appreciation to all those who stepped up to help on various committees, volunteers to host events, speak on topic panels and advocate at the legislature for more support on the items we provide. I would be remiss if I did not recognize the person who has been the "glue" in keeping our organization running, a BIG thank you to Lauren Haven, our long-standing county association administrator who quietly goes about her work, assuring we are informed and updated on important matters from legislative reports to maintaining our organizational financial records. Her biggest challenge this year was helping me to implement many of my new proposals and idea. I know I pushed hard on many of you and she carried the orders and requests out well. I am grateful for all she has done and the many points she was able to share on the historical actions of the association and its members. Lauren we are truly blessed to have you as our administrator.



While 2025 has been a full year with some positive developments. I believe we can make great strides in educating the legislature and others on the value that county government can and does provide. I also look forward to furthering our relationships with municipal and county partners and adding more opportunities for educational opportunities. With your help County Government will be even Stronger in 2026!