

. The Core Issue: Frozen Funding & Rising Costs

Since 2021, the [State of Maine](#) has capped the amount counties can raise through property taxes for jails and frozen the County Jail Operations Fund at approximately **\$20.4 million**.

- **The Funding Gap:** While operational costs have surged, state funding remains stuck at 2021 levels.
- **Current State Share:** The state now pays for only **14–15%** of jail operations, despite dictating 80% of the incarceration process through laws and sentencing.
- **Recommendation:** The Jail Standard Council completed its report based upon LD 719, the study is currently calling for an immediate **\$8 million increase** to the annual state allocation to address this structural deficit to return to the historical 20% state responsibility to county jail funding.

2. Impact on Municipal Property Taxes

Because counties cannot exceed state-mandated property tax caps for correctional services, they are running out of options.

- **Drained Reserves:** Washington, Penobscot, and Waldo counties have completely exhausted their reserve funds to cover jail deficits.
- **Taxpayer Burden:** When state funding stays flat, the burden shifts to local municipalities. [Penobscot County](#), for example, was recently forced to approved a 2026 budget requiring a **15.6% tax increase** to bridge a \$3.5 million shortfall.
- **Sustainability:** Using one-time reserve funds to pay for ongoing operations is no longer a viable long-term strategy for local governments.

3. Growing Challenges: Health & Acuity

The jail population has become increasingly expensive to manage due to a rise in residents with specialized needs.

- **Mental Health Crisis:** With state psychiatric beds often full, jails have become the default [mental health centers of last resort](#), leading to longer stays and higher supervision costs.
- **Substance Use Disorders (SUD):** Jails are mandated to provide [Medication-Assisted Treatment \(MAT\)](#) and intensive monitoring, which significantly increases medical contract costs.

- **Labor Market:** To maintain safety, jails must pay competitive wages. [Overtime costs](#) are currently exceeding budgets in most counties due to staffing shortages and increased inmate acuity.

4. Action Requested for Elected Officials

- **Advocate for Supplemental Funding:** Support the requested \$8 million increase in the Governor's Supplemental Budget to provide immediate relief.
- **Reform Funding Formulas:** Encourage the Legislature to adopt a funding model that adjusts annually based on inflation and mandated services.