

AI responses may include mistakes. For legal advice, consult a professional. [Learn more](#)  
draft legislator letter

February 12, 2026

The Honorable [Legislator Name]  
Maine House of Representatives / State Senate  
2 State House Station

Augusta, ME 04333

**RE: Urgent Need for Sustainable State Funding for County Jails**

Dear [Representative/Senator] [Last Name],

As the Sheriff of [Your County] and a constituent of [Your District], I am writing to alert you to a mounting fiscal crisis facing our county jail—a crisis that now directly threatens both public safety and the financial stability of our local property taxpayers.

For five consecutive years, the state's annual allocation to the **County Jail Operations Fund has remained frozen at approximately \$20.4 million**. During this same period, the actual cost of operating our facilities has skyrocketed. In 2026, this state contribution is expected to cover **less than 15%** of total operational costs, leaving local property owners to shoulder more than 85% of the burden.

Our jails have become the state's default "emergency rooms" for individuals in crisis. We are managing a population that is increasingly older and sicker, with a significant rise in inmates requiring intensive treatment for **mental health and substance use disorders**. These individuals often remain in our custody for longer periods while awaiting court dates or specialized care, driving up medical and staffing costs that the state-imposed property tax cap fails to account for.

The current funding model is no longer sustainable. Several counties, including **Penobscot, Washington, and Waldo**, have already exhausted their reserve funds just to maintain mandatory operations. In Penobscot County alone, commissioners recently approved a 2026 budget requiring a **15.6% tax increase** to bridge the gap left by stagnant state aid.

I urge you to support the **\$8 million annual funding increase** recently recommended by the County Corrections Professional Standards Council. It is critical that the State of Maine, which dictates approximately 80% of the incarceration process through its laws and standards, provides a share of funding that reflects this responsibility.

Thank you for your time and for your dedication to the safety of our communities. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these challenges with you further or to provide a tour of our facility so you can see these pressures firsthand.

Respectfully,

[Your Name]

Sheriff, [Your County] County

AI responses may include mistakes. For legal advice, consult a professional. [Learn more](#)



+5



8 sites

- **Council recommends \$8 million increase in annual county jail ...**  
Feb 4, 2026 – In Knox County, the sheriff said the jail would relocate long-term inmates to save on boarding costs. In western Maine, Androscogg...



Maine Public



- **HOUSE ON REPRESENTATIVES - Maine Legislature**  
be rescinded. ... create difficulties for some county jail operations. Maine's county jails are the emergency rooms of the state's...



Maine Legislature (.gov)

- **March 3, 2025 - Maine Legislature**  
Mar 3, 2025 – all impacted by the same labor costs, insurance increases, and rising food and energy prices. LD719 seeks to raise the State's con...



Maine State Legislature (.gov)



Show all

What measures are county jails in Maine taking to address rising operational costs besides seeking state funding?

In 2026, county jails in

Maine

are employing several strategies beyond state legislative requests to manage mounting deficits and rising operational costs.

## Fiscal and Structural Measures

- **Draining Reserve Funds:** Many counties, including

[Androscoggin](#)

,

[Penobscot](#)

,

[Washington](#)

, and

[Waldo](#)

, have been forced to tap into their "undesignated fund balances" or reserve accounts to cover year-end deficits. In

[Aroostook County](#)

, commissioners established a specific reserve account specifically to address a **\$600,000** jail deficit.

- **Property Tax Increases:** Despite state caps, some counties have approved substantial budget increases that fall on local municipalities. For example,

[Penobscot County](#)

approved a **\$35.3 million** budget for 2026, which necessitated a **15.6%** tax increase over the previous year.

- **Regional Consolidation:** In western Maine,

[Androscoggin](#)

,

[Franklin](#)

, and

### [Oxford](#)

counties have agreed to explore opening a shared regional jail to save on transportation and administrative overhead.



Maine Public +3

## Operational Cost Containment

- **Inmate Relocation:** To save on boarding costs,

### [Knox County](#)

has implemented a strategy of relocating long-term inmates to other facilities. Conversely, jails facing overcrowding, such as

### [Androscoggin](#)

, are projecting an additional **\$700,000** in 2026 just for boarding their inmates at other county facilities.

- **Targeted Revenue Streams:**

- **Opioid Settlement Funds:** Some counties, including

### [Penobscot](#)

, are using their share of opioid settlement dollars to supplement the costs of state-mandated Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) for substance use disorders.

- **Federal Housing Fees:** Jails often rely on revenue from housing federal detainees for **ICE** or the **U.S. Marshals Service**, typically at a rate of approximately **\$150 per day**. However, this revenue is volatile;

### [Cumberland County](#)

anticipates needing to collect **14%** more in taxes for the next fiscal year because ICE is removing its detainees from their facility.

- **Technology Fees:** New legislation for the 2025-26 fiscal year allows for the collection of technology fees from residents to offset the maintenance costs of provided technology.



Maine Public +6

## Medical and Service Adjustments

- **MaineCare Reimbursement:** Jails are working to utilize MaineCare program reimbursements for services provided to incarcerated individuals, particularly for those within **90 days of release**, to facilitate community transition and lower direct jail medical spending.
- **Tightening Free Service Eligibility:** For the 2025-26 fiscal year, some facilities are increasing the minimum balance a client must have in their account (from \$15 to \$30) to remain eligible for free medical and dental services, generating a modest increase in revenue.



Maine State Legislature (.gov) +1