

As an attorney, I see the cracks in our justice system every day, and they are widening into a full-scale crisis. Our legislature has two immediate opportunities to prevent a collapse: fulfilling the state's obligation to fund county jails and passing emergency funding for indigent legal services.

For years, the state has failed to meet its commitment to cover **20% of county jail operating costs**. This neglect has forced a massive financial burden onto local property taxpayers, who now fund roughly **75-83% of operations**. This is not just a fiscal failure; it's a policy of "legislating by mandate" where the state sets incarceration standards but leaves homeowners to foot the bill. The supplemental budget must include the recommended **\$8 million increase** to the County Jail Operations Fund to provide necessary relief to our communities.

Equally urgent is the "constitutional crisis" facing the **Maine Commission on Public Defense Services** (formerly MCILS). The agency recently warned it has **run out of money** to pay the attorneys who represent low-income Mainers. Without the **\$13 million in emergency funding** currently before appropriations, these lawyers—many are small business owners—will go unpaid until July. If we cannot pay counsel, the system stops: cases are delayed, victims wait for justice, and the Sixth Amendment rights of the accused are effectively suspended.

A functioning justice system requires adequately funded facilities and the guaranteed right to counsel. I urge our lawmakers to support these critical funding measures in the supplemental budget before the system breaks beyond repair.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Law Firm/Town]