



**Maine County Commissioners Association
 Maine Municipal Association
 Maine Sheriffs Association
 Maine Service Centers Coalition
 Maine Association of County Clerks, Administrators,
 and Managers**

April 8, 2026

Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations
 and Financial Affairs
 Maine State Legislature
 Augusta, ME 04333

Re: ***LD 2232, An Act to Increase County Jail Funding***

Dear Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee:

On behalf of the associations representing local government organizations in Maine, we write to request the passage and funding of LD 2232, which was strongly supported by the Criminal Justice and Public Safety (CJPS) Committee, on a bipartisan basis. In its current state, as amended by Committee Amendment “A” (Majority Report), the bill provides an additional \$9.6 million in state funding urgently needed to support the continued operation of Maine’s county jails. This bill enacts the recommendations of the County Corrections Professional Standards Council reported to the CJPS Committee in January, as directed by LD 719, *Resolve to Direct the County Corrections Professional Standards Council to Examine Funding and Compliance by County and Regional Jails*.

County jails have become the State’s emergency room, driving up local costs. County jails are a core component of the State’s criminal justice system, managing approximately 30,000 admissions annually (up 46% since 2021). Of the total, 75% of incarcerated individuals have a substance use disorder, and 60% are classified with a mental health disorder. At the same time, medical care costs have increased 36% since 2023, both due to a growing number of individuals being incarcerated and the rising cost of providing adequate medical care, both of which are out of the control of local governments.

As state support for jails decreases, property tax bills for jails increase significantly. In the early 2020s, state support for county jails was approximately 20% of county jail operating costs, with most of the remainder coming from property taxpayers. In FY25 and FY26, state budget allocations of \$24.4 million, coupled with rising county jail costs, had the impact of reducing the state’s share of county jail operations from 19% to 18%. For FY27, the current state budget reduces state support to \$20.4 million, which represents just 15% of the \$137 million spent statewide to operate county jails. This year-over-year reduction of \$4M represents a cut for every county, as shown below.

Impact of \$4M Loss in Jail Operation Funding by County	
ANDROSCOGGIN	\$ (512,914.00)
AROOSTOOK	\$ (242,194.00)
CUMBERLAND	\$ (792,010.00)
FRANKLIN	\$ (54,934.00)
HANCOCK	\$ (108,365.00)
KENNEBEC	\$ (367,162.00)
KNOX	\$ (134,971.00)
LINCOLN	\$ (60,937.00)
SAGADAHOC	\$ (60,937.00)
ME COASTAL RCC (Waldo)	\$ (23,384.00)
OXFORD	\$ (193,044.00)
PENOBSCOT	\$ (596,480.00)
PISCATAQUIS	\$ (31,479.00)
SOMERSET	\$ (200,312.00)
WALDO	\$ (105,884.00)
WASHINGTON	\$ (109,387.00)
YORK	\$ (407,607.00)
TOTAL	\$ (4,002,001.00)

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These cuts, combined with rising service delivery costs, are triggering double digit increases in most county taxes that are directly impacting municipal budgets and straining the ability of homeowners to pay their property taxes.

Many county jails are literally running out of money, threatening future operations. Under state law, counties are prohibited from raising property taxes to fund jail expenses in excess of 4% per year. In recent years, as local jail costs increase and state support flattens or decreases, counties are maxing out their allowed property tax increases and more rapidly depleting their undesignated fund reserves, which are vital to fiscal sustainability. Many counties have now drawn down their operating surplus below the recommended level of 20%, or fully exhausted their reserves, as noted below.

County	Use of Fund Balance to Finance Jails (FY26)
Androscoggin	Using \$350,000 to fund jail deficit
Aroostook	Currently retaining less than 20% threshold
Cumberland	Using \$500,000 to offset taxes and maintain 20% threshold
Franklin	Currently retaining less than 20% threshold
Hancock	Currently retaining less than 20% threshold
Kennebec	Using \$650, to offset taxes and maintain 20% threshold
Knox	Using \$350,000 to fund jail deficit
Lincoln	\$0 Fund Balance Use
Oxford	\$0 Fund Balance Use, but will use \$800,000 in Casino Revenue to offset taxes
Penobscot	Exhausted Fund Balance Reserves in FY25
Piscataquis	Currently retaining less than 20% threshold
Sagadahoc	Currently retaining less than 20% threshold
Somerset	Using \$935,000 to offset taxes and maintain 20% threshold
Two Bridges Jail	Using \$48,470 from Regional Jail Authority Fund Balance
Waldo	Currently retaining less than 20% threshold
Washington	Exhausted Fund Balance Reserves in FY25
York	Using \$300,000 to offset taxes, puts County below 20% threshold

Looking ahead, without more state support, some counties may be compelled to reduce services, lay off correctional staff, or in the worst case scenario, both reduce the services provided and lay off staff. Such outcomes would undermine public safety and run counter to the shared goals of a fair, effective, and responsible criminal justice system in Maine.

LD 2232 is needed to create financial sustainability for county jails and predictability for Maine's property taxpayers. Our organizations strongly support the policy direction reflected in LD 2232, because, not only will it increase the baseline level of state support for the County Jail Operations Fund to \$30 million per year, but also account for inflationary pressures by tying annual increases to changes in the consumer price index. The changes proposed in LD 2232 would restore and, over the course of time, maintain the state's historic 20% level of support for county jails. This approach will result in needed property tax relief and more fiscal stability for county jails and county budgets. More state funding for county jails also directly aligns with a key recommendation of the Real Estate Property Tax Relief Task Force issued this February.

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A path forward. Although our associations previously urged that the current Supplemental Budget (LD 2212) include an additional \$4 million for county jails in FY26 and \$8 million in FY27, those requests are not included in the proposal. However, the Appropriations Committee and this Legislature still have an opportunity to stabilize county jail operations so that jails can meet their state-imposed operating requirements while reducing the burdens on already strained local property taxpayers. We believe this can be accomplished by amending LD 2232, as summarized below and outlined in the attached amendment.

1. **Push the ongoing state funding increase out of the current biennium.** If the Supplemental Budget stays in its current form, and there are limited funds for additional programs and services, LD 2232 should be amended to increase state support for county jails starting in FY28, as opposed to starting the additional funding in FY27. Understanding that one Legislature cannot bind another, this important change would provide a solid foundation for having these vital conversations about county jail funding, starting with the 133rd Legislature.
2. **Providing at least \$4 million in additional state support in FY27.** LD 2232 currently calls for an appropriation of about \$9.6M for FY27. This appropriation can be amended to reflect funds actually available from the Appropriations Table, recognizing that any amount appropriated less than \$4M in FY27 represents a cut from FY26 levels.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this information to the Committee. As noted, the financial situation for our county jails is growing increasingly dire, and legislative action is required. We thank the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee for advancing LD 2232, and we thank both houses of the Legislature for strong votes in support of this bill. Now that LD 2232 is on the Special Appropriations Table, we urge the Appropriations Committee to take whatever steps it can to help move this bill forward to final passage – for the good of county jails, the state’s criminal justice system, and the property taxpayer.

Andre E Cushing III

Commissioner Andre E Cushing III, President
Maine County Commissioners Association

Troy Merton

Sheriff Troy Morton, Penobscot, President
Maine Sheriff’s Association

Phillip Crowell, Jr.

Auburn City Manager Phillip Crowell, President
Maine Service Centers Coalition

Maine Municipal Association

Maine Municipal Association

Tim Curtis.

Tim Curtis, Somerset County Administrator, President
Maine Association of County Clerks, Administrators, and Managers

cc: Legislative leadership
Members, Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

Date: April __, 2026

L.D. 2232
(Filing No. S-)

SENATE AMENDMENT “ ” to COMMITTEE AMENDMENT “A” to
H.P. 1507, L.D. 2232, “An Act to Increase County Jail Funding”

Amend the amendment by changing the effective date and allocation:

'Sec. 1. 34-A MRSA §1210-E, sub-§2, as enacted by PL 2021, c. 732, Pt. A, §3 and affected by §5, is amended to read:

2. County Jail Operations Fund. The County Jail Operations Fund is established to provide funding for county jails and the regional jail. State funding must be appropriated annually for the fund in the amount of \$30,000,000 for fiscal years beginning ~~on or after~~ July 1, ~~2026~~ 2027, plus any additional amount the Legislature may appropriate. The amount required to be appropriated under this subsection must be adjusted annually by any percentage change in the Consumer Price Index from January 1st to December 31st of the previous year. The department shall administer the fund and shall distribute funds to the jails in accordance with this section for the purposes set forth in subsections 3 and 4 and in accordance with the distribution formula set forth in subsection 9. State funds appropriated for the fund that are unexpended at the end of the fiscal year to which the funds are appropriated do not lapse but must carry forward into subsequent fiscal years to be expended for the purposes of this section. For the purposes of this subsection, "Consumer Price Index" has the same meaning as in Title 5, section 17001, subsection 9.

Amend the amendment by striking and replacing Section 4 to read as follows:

'Sec. 4. Appropriations and allocations. The following appropriations and allocations are made.

CORRECTIONS, DEPARTMENT OF

County Jail Operations Fund Z227

Initiative: Provides one-time supplemental funding to the County Jail Operations Fund for FY27 to be allocated among counties in the manner provided for appropriations under title 34-A MRSA §1210-E, sub-§2:

GENERAL FUND	2025-26	2026-27
All Other	\$0	TBD
GENERAL FUND TOTAL	<hr/>	<hr/>
	\$0	TBD

SUMMARY

This amendment amends Committee Amendment “A” in two ways. First, the increase in the level of state support for the County Jail Operating Fund is modified to start on July 1, 2027 rather than July 1, 2026. Second, the bill establishes a one-time state appropriation of \$_____ for FY27 to be allocated in a manner consistent with other state appropriations to the County Jail Operating Fund.