

MAINE REGISTERS OF DEEDS ASSOCIATION

January 18, 2024

President	Cherri L. Crockett, Oxford	Vice President	Jessica Spaulding, Cumberland
Treasurer	Rebecca Wotton, Lincoln	Secretary	Madelene Cole, Knox

To: Maine County Commissioners Association
Chairman Gorden, Cumberland County Commissioner

From: Maine Registers of Deeds Association
President, Cherri L. Crockett, Oxford County Register of Deeds

RE: Maine Revenue Tax Portal; Proposed LIVE Date for Registries: 10.2024
Fee Schedule Proposal; Projected Date to Legislature: 1.2025
Non-Partisan Proposal; Projected Date to Legislature: 1.2025

Dear Cumberland County Commissioner Gorden and members of the Maine County Commissioners Association,

My name is Cherri Crockett. I serve as Register of Deeds for Oxford County, and as President of the Maine Registers of Deeds Association. Thank you for your time.

I would like to present to you three topics for your consideration to support the Maine Registers of Deeds Association; the Maine Revenue Tax Portal, Registry of Deeds Fee Schedule proposal and Non-Partisan Register of Deeds proposal.

- **Maine Revenue Tax Portal**

- **What is the Tax Portal?**

- This is an online State payment system that provides a way for tax preparers and collectors of miscellaneous taxes to submit their payments to Maine Revenue Service. Currently, we do not know if the Registers are required to submit their monthly checks this way or if the attorneys and document submitters are being required to submit transfer taxes through the portal, thereby circumventing the county completely.

- **Where do the Registries/Counties Stand Currently?**

- This project is set to roll out for the Registries to go live in October of this year, 2024, and we are currently awaiting further information on the expectation and impact on our offices from the State. In the meantime, we are left to only guess and prepare for

unknown impact.

We first learned of the Tax Portal in January of 2021, but have yet to be provided with any definitive details for the expectation of the Registries utilizing the new system.

I have been in contact with Lisa Whynot, ME Revenue Property Division, contact for the Tax Portal, to include us in this conversation, no matter how preliminary, as the whole process affects our daily operations. I have yet to receive a request to assist or clarify any processes.

There are a lot of “what ifs” concerning software, system functions, tracking, statutory responsibility, proper training, etc.

Any potential portal considerations will take the Registries time, especially if they require us to dig into our budgets for software upgrades, etc., of which, most of us have already set our 2024 budgets.

On behalf of the Registers, I have requested to be included for insight from all aspects of the current process, as it makes sense for those who know the current system and operate it daily to share.

As I stated earlier, we are preparing for impact, and we are taking worst case scenario into consideration. In this case we consider the worst to be the loss of revenue by the state taking away our 10% of Transfer Tax collected by having the tax paid directly to the state and not through the Registry.

For smaller counties, the Transfer Tax has historically covered the office budget.

Reporting counties for 2023 are as follows:

(each Register provides an annual calculation of revenue received as an association. Below are those who have currently reported 2023)

Androscoggin County: \$295,185.11
Cumberland County: \$1,491,027.01
Franklin County: \$114,683.25
Hancock County: \$316,564.60
Knox County: \$198,571.56
Aroostook North: \$36,992.01
Aroostook South: \$118,428.09
Oxford: \$232,459.18
Penobscot: \$317,199.96
Piscataquis: \$61,533.67
Sagadahoc: \$133,040.05
Waldo: \$120,072.15
Washington: \$87,421.15
York: \$1,122,641.96

As you can see, our counties would suffer a great loss **IF** our worst-case scenario were to play out.

At this time, I humbly request the Maine County Commissioners to support the Maine Registers of Deeds Association in our efforts to gain insight as to the

potential impact on the County from implementation of the Tax Portal.

ACTION REQUESTED:

Would it be reasonable to request a Letter of Support from the MCCA to urge the State to allow the Registries insight to the goals and objectives of implementation of the Tax Portal to date?

- **Fee Schedule Proposal**

The registries are seeking an increase in fees to keep up with the demand of increasing costs to operate. There has not been a fee increase since 2014. In an effort to better serve the function of the registries and continue to uphold our statutory responsibility to preserve the documents we are charged with; I humbly request your support in our efforts to increase our fees.

We have invited Senator Rick Bennett to attend our February 16th meeting at the Oxford County Registry of Deeds to review our requests and to consider Sponsorship of our request.

I have attached two PDFs drafted by our Legislative Committee and approved by the members of MRODA, detailing our proposal.

**** Surcharge Title 33 Sec 752 Revision for 2025**

**** Title 33, Sec. 751 Fees**

ACTION REQUESTED:

Would it be reasonable to request a Letter of Support from the MCCA to Legislators at the time the bill gains sponsorship for the 2025 session?

- **Non-Partisan Register of Deeds Election Proposal**

The Registers have been interested in exploring a change to making the Register of Deeds position Non-Partisan.

Tally of member Register votes (3 Appointed/14 Elected) to pursue Non-Partisan:

*14 For

*2 Abstain

*1 Against

Members cited several reasons in support of this movement include the increasing difficulty in obtaining same party, registered-voter signatures, but more importantly, the desire to see continuity in registry function.

Reasoning against the movement included high statutory impact.

And those who abstained didn't feel confident in making a decision either way.

Per the voting results you see above, our members will continue to keep discussions open to see if we can come to a unanimous decision to move forward

with this proposal. We have invited Senator Rick Bennett to attend our February 16th meeting at the Oxford County Registry of Deeds to review and consider Sponsorship of our request.

I have attached a PDF drafted by our Legislative Committee and approved by the members of the MRODA.

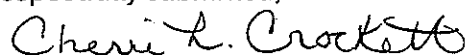
**** Title 21 Legislative Change Election**

ACTION REQUESTED:

Would it be reasonable to request a Letter of Support from the MCCA to Legislators at the time the bill gains sponsorship for the 2025 session?

I thank you for your time and consideration and look forward to attending your Zoom meeting on Monday, January 22nd at 1pm. I will be happy to elaborate or clarify any of the topics above.

Respectfully submitted,



Cherri L. Crockett

Register of Deeds, Oxford County

President, Maine Registers of Deeds Association