

Below is a **revised formal President's Message** incorporating **specific funding gap data** and the **"emergency room" intake reality** of county jails, with facts grounded in publicly available testimony and reporting.

President's Message

Maine's county jails serve a critical and immediate role within the state's criminal justice system. Every day, county governments operate facilities that house individuals detained or sentenced under state law, fulfilling obligations that arise directly from statewide public safety policy, court activity, and sentencing guidelines. In practice, county jails function as the system's **emergency rooms**—the point of intake for all arrested individuals, regardless of the time of day, the seriousness of their condition, or the resources required to care for them.

Unlike most public services, jail intake is unpredictable. Counties cannot control how many individuals will arrive on a given day, how long they will remain in custody, or the medical and behavioral health needs they bring with them. Increasingly, those entering county jails present with significant **mental health and substance use disorders**, requiring intensive assessment, treatment, and supervision from the moment of intake. These demands drive staffing, medical, and compliance costs that counties are legally required to meet.

For many years following the efforts at jail consolidation, the State of Maine recognized this shared responsibility through a commitment to fund **20 percent of total county jail operating costs**. In recent years, however, state funding has remained essentially flat at approximately **\$20.4 million annually**, an amount that now covers **less than 15 percent of total jail operating costs statewide**. The County Corrections Professional Standards Council has documented an **unfunded gap of roughly \$9.6 million in FY 2026 and more than \$10 million in FY 2027** just to meet mandated services, largely driven by healthcare and substance use treatment requirements.

[\[legislatur....maine.gov\]](#), [\[newsbreak.com\]](#) [\[legislatur....maine.gov\]](#)

This funding gap has created an urgent fiscal crisis for counties. Across Maine, counties have been forced to cover recurring jail deficits by drawing down fund balances and reserves. Penobscot County alone has faced jail shortfalls exceeding **\$3.5 million**, while other counties report deficits ranging from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars, rapidly eroding reserves intended for emergencies and longterm stability. [\[mainepublic.org\]](#), [\[thecounty.me\]](#)

Property taxpayers cannot reasonably be expected to shoulder the cost of services that are fundamentally part of the state's criminal justice infrastructure. Counties do not control arrest rates, sentencing decisions, or statutory mandates, yet they are bearing the financial consequences of those decisions.

County jails are indispensable to public safety. Restoring predictable state participation at the previously committed **20 percent level** is essential to stabilizing county finances, protecting property taxpayers, and ensuring that Maine's criminal justice system continues to function safely and effectively.

Andre Cushing

President