COUNTY NEWS

Maine County Commissioners Association Newsletter

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MEDICAID AND COUNTIES

Understanding the program and why it matters to counties

NACo NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES

Medicaid is a target in the 115th Congress. As the population continues to age and health care costs continue to rise, Medicaid costs are projected to increase at a time when Congress is trying to balance the budget and increase defense spending. A recent proposal by the House Republican Task Force on Health Care Reform would require states to accept a per capita cap or block grant, both of which would shrink federal funding for state Medicaid programs over time. Under a per capita cap, states would receive a fixed amount of federal funding per beneficiary category. Under a block grant, states would receive a fixed amount of federal funding each year, regardless of changes in program enrollment and mandates. Such measures would further shift costs to counties and reduce counties' capacity to provide health services to their residents. NACo released an updated legislative presentation called, "Medicaid and Counties: Understanding the program and why it matters to counties" to help policymakers understand how counties are involved in funding and delivering Medicaid services and how this proposal, part of Speaker Paul Ryan's "Better Way" blueprint released last year, could shift costs to counties and taxpayers. *~Brian Bowden, NACo Assoc. Legislative Director. Click here to see the presentation on Medicaid & Counties. Click here for more on block grants. Click here for more on the Better Way blueprint.*

PISCATAQUIS COUNTY COURTHOUSE

PISCATAQUIS COUNTY

Piscataquis History and Geography

It has been said about Piscataquis that no one can pronounce it (Pis-CAT-a-quis) or spell it, and few know where it is. Finding Piscataquis County is rather easy, however. Place your finger on a map at the geographic center of Maine, and it will land near Dover-Foxcroft, the Piscataquis shiretown.

Piscataquis, at 3,967 square miles, is the second largest county in Maine. With an estimated population of 16,931 as of 2015, it has by far the fewest residents in our state. The population density of 4.26 people per square mile is one of the lowest of any county east of the Mississippi River and qualifies Piscataquis as a "frontier county" in the eyes of the U.S. Census Bureau.

Piscataquis was formed from Penobscot and Somerset counties in 1838 and named after the river of the same name, which is a major tributary of the Penobscot. A portion of the original territory of Piscataquis, nearly 60 townships, was set off and annexed to Aroostook in 1844.

Dover was initially established as the county seat, but after it joined with the neighboring village of Foxcroft in 1922, the combined town of Dover-Foxcroft has hosted county government. The county includes 17 towns, two organized plantations, and 98 unorganized townships.

Piscataquis County contains Maine's highest mountain, Katahdin, and its largest lake, Moosehead. Within its borders are Baxter State Park, the 100-Mile Wilderness section of the Appalachian Trail, a major portion of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, and over 900,000 acres of public lands, parks and preserves.   ~Tom Lizotte, County Manager

A County of Unorganized Territories

Piscataquis County is not a disorganized place. Yet it sure is unorganized.

It does not take long after passing through the Piscataquis River Valley towns of Dover-Foxcroft, Milo and Guilford, or Greenville at the foot of Moosehead Lake, for a visitor to realize he has entered another, wilder world – the Unorganized Territory, or UT.

Piscataquis County is 85% forested, and another 10% is covered by lakes and rivers. Only a small part of the county was ever settled due to its remote, roadless, mountainous terrain. There are 98 unorganized townships in the Piscataquis UT, of which only 28 have place names. The other 70 townships are un-named, and carry such designations as Township 7, Range 14.

The total population of the Piscataquis UT is 775. Those residents receive municipal services delivered through Piscataquis County government, but only 14 of the 98 UT townships have enough of a year-round population to make service delivery feasible. It is expensive to serve so few people scattered over so much territory, and the annual Piscataquis UT budget is just over $1.5 million, funded by UT taxpayers. Those UT taxpayers also pay a 32.8% share of the County's general budget.

The County contracts with local businesses for snow removal and maintenance of roads and bridges on the 73 miles of county roads. Two county transfer stations in Lily Bay and Orneville handle solid waste disposal in the UT. Piscataquis County contracts with the towns of Greenville, Monson, Sebec, Milo, Brownville and Millinocket (in Penobscot County) for fire protection in the UT, and the Piscataquis Sheriff's Department is responsible for police protection and dispatch services. Other municipal services provided to UT residents through the County include ambulance services, cemetery maintenance, animal control, snowmobile and ATV trail grants management, E-911 addressing and elections.

The Piscataquis UT may grow larger in the next few years, as the Town of Atkinson (pop. 326) is seeking legislative approval for deorganization. If successful, Atkinson will join such former organized Piscataquis towns as Orneville, Blanchard, Elliottsville and Barnard in preferring Unorganized Territory status.

SHERIFFS PISCATAQUIS COUNTY MAINE OFFICE

Sheriff's Office

The Sheriff's Office consists of thirty-five full time and thirty part-time employees that operate out of five divisions: Corrections, Communications, Transport, Patrol and Investigations, and Civil Services. The department is managed by Sheriff John Goggin who sets policy and oversees every division. He is assisted by Chief Deputy Robert Young who also works investigations and responds to calls. In the photo from left to right are Lt. Kane, Jail Administrator Maria Landry, Sgt. Grant Chief Young, Sgt. Moulton, and seated is Sheriff Goggin.
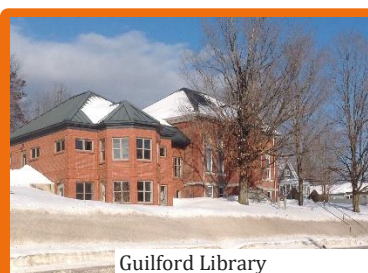
A Countywide Approach to Economic Development

When the Piscataquis County Economic Development Council (PCEDC) was formed in 1997, it decided to take a regional, countywide approach to economic growth, rather than concentrating on a town-by-town work plan. And instead of seeking financial support from individual towns, the PCEDC pitched its funding request to regional government and the Piscataquis County Commissioners.

County Jail

The PCEDC's first county budget appropriation was approved for $25,000, which grew to $40,000 annually and later to $75,000. Now, 20 years later, the Piscataquis County Commissioners provide an appropriation of $105,500 for the PCEDC, which has a total budget of $124,000.

It has been money well spent. Over the past year, PCEDC has brought in $1,044,000 in private funding, Community Development Block Grant monies, and EPA Brownfields grants to county towns, businesses and non-profits. In addition, PCEDC was successful in securing state funds to undertake a planning study on improving broadband Internet connectivity Commissioner James Annis serves as an ex officio member of PCEDC's Executive Committee, and County Manager Tom Lizotte is the committee's Vice Chair.

Guilford Library

Dover Square Congregational Church