

**TESTIMONY before the Committees on Appropriations
and Criminal Justice and Public Safety**
Regarding LD 1001, state biennial budget
Jail Funding

March 19, 2019

Senators Breen and Deschambault, Representatives Gattine and Warren, and distinguished members of the Committees on Appropriations and Criminal Justice. My name is Travis Kennedy and I'm the Director of Public Affairs for Cumberland County government. I'm here to testify on behalf of the County in support of Governor Mills's proposed level of funding for the County Jail Operations Fund in the state biennial budget.

The jails are critical partners in Maine's public safety network; and increasingly, in the state's mental health and substance misuse treatment networks as well. But flaws in programming and funding established under the now defunct Board of Corrections, coupled with limits that counties can raise to support jail costs have created a permanent, structural gap in funding for county jails.

Most jail costs are fixed, without room to negotiate price. Required services and standards, and increased payroll and health care costs all contribute to a critical system that is increasingly expensive to fund, and increasingly hamstrung by a lack of resources.

Cumberland County's 2019 jail budget saw a modest increase over the past year of only 2.49 percent, an especially low number that we're proud of considering the constantly rising costs of health care and labor in a competitive market, to name just a few challenges. To fund this budget, in part, we did increase the municipal contribution toward the jail at the full four percent allowable under law. We cannot ask the towns for more. But state funding at the level proposed by Governor Mills through a similar distribution established in 2018 will allow us to close the rest of the gap.

The Governor's proposal was not pulled from thin air; far from it. As many of you will remember, it mirrors the final funding level established for the current fiscal year. This was arrived upon after a significant amount of collaborative work by the members of both of these Committees along with the counties and sheriffs in the previous Legislature. Those groups worked together to

identify the structural gap in jail funding, and the best approach to close it.

Last year the Criminal Justice unanimously proposed and the Appropriations Committee nearly unanimously endorsed this level and method for state funding to county jails, which was also supported by all sixteen Maine counties. The funding went to the bodies in two separate bills, both of which survived vetoes from the former Governor.

I cannot possibly stress enough how big of a miracle all of that is.

The result of that work was an appropriate and sufficient state contribution, distributed through a simple and fair formula with a portion of those funds kept aside for those counties running extra deficits.

I was pleased to report last year that Cumberland County found the current level and method of funding - in conjunction with the allowable four-percent annual increase in our municipal tax assessment - to be workable (if not ideal) for the foreseeable future. Our position has not changed. We appreciate Governor Mills's recognition

of the critical need to support county jails and hope that you will see fit to support her request.

I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.