

## Remarks Before the AFA

Madam Chair, Senator Catherine Breen, Chairman, Representative Andrew Gattine and members of the Appropriations & Finance Committee

Good Afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak on the Covid-19 matter.

My name is Steve Gorden, a Cumberland County Commissioner and the President of the Maine County Commissioners Association or the MCCA.

I've submitted some pre-testimony attachments, as examples, so that you may understand County Commissioners are very serious about the Covid-19 issue and its effect on our citizenry, our personnel and those external to the organization with whom we interact and serve - it's in concert with what others here have expressed.

From the Counties' perspective, I believe Carrie Kipfer has covered the topic of cost from an internal economic point of view. What I intend to stress is what has changed and how it may affect us for the future. In addition, you should realize that the Covid-19 expenses are not finished as of yet. There is serious discussion within the epidemiological community that it may require another shut down before the pandemic is under control.

As President of Maine County Commissioners Association, MCCA, please recognize that our constituency is the 16 Counties and because of the size and location of each, we're distinct, diverse and yet similar. Examples? Cumberland and York Counties' population each dwarfs the other Counties and yet all are required to provide the same level of service. Three Counties have within them singular communities with larger populations than each of the smallest Counties. I point this out as access to revenue through property tax is an issue for Counties at differing degrees; thus, these parameters make one-size-fits-all proclamations nay impractical.

The interesting phenomenon within our State's minor governments is that a number of us are totally dependent upon property tax for our source of revenue, excepting the support we're able to negotiate with the Legislature; for Counties jail funding is the major one, which brings me to Covid-19.

You may recall the Counties are responsible for the following: The District Courts, the Jails, law enforcement, the District Attorneys' operations and housing, Registrars of Deeds and Probate along with its judge, maintenance, emergency management, 911 Dispatch Centers and our administrative offices.

As you know, our State's governmental administration issued a number of executive/administrative covid-19 orders (mandates) that affected all the Counties' operations and facilities. Each of these orders caused us and our sister governmental entities to change methodologies of operations and invest in additional items to provide for the protection of the citizenry and our employees. Some of these ordered changes caused alterations for the best; they were more efficient and more economical (i.e. arraignments by telecommunication, form

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completions and bill payments through the internet), others caused increased efforts (i.e. new protocols at the Jails to isolate arrested individuals from the rest of the population until shown non-infectious. That required testing, isolating facilities, new handling procedures for our personnel, masks, PPE). Other internal County areas affected were the creation of departmental separation windows between the public and our employees, additional cleaning during and after hours, the temporary closing of facilities, employee separation by transferring many to work at home, the preparation to move emergency functions should they become contaminated. All changes created additional expenses.

The jails are particularly costly, as they are part of the State's "**public service of last resort.**"<sup>i</sup> When the other State Departments cannot provide adequate services, generally, the individual goes down the "rabbit hole" of violating a law, entering the judicial system, and paying a fine or serving time. A great example of this are those individuals with mental illness, for which I, personally, believe DHHS is totally responsible - it's incongruous that an individual with such a mental disorder is held with and in a criminal incarceration facility. To accentuate that point, over 75% of our incarcerates receive, daily, some psychotropic medication; sadly, we call the Cumberland County Jail the largest mental institution in the State.

Again, the Gubernatorial orders caused change or transitioning from one set of operational procedures or facilities to another and thus Counties, and other sister governments, incurred additional expenses, such as Carrie expressed. Now, the question becomes from where will the support for these additional costs be expensed? Ultimately, we all know it is the taxpayer... but from which tax bucket will it flow: Sales, Income or Property, which is the most regressive?

I appreciate your time and thank you for listening.

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<sup>i</sup> County Jails have become the "**Public Service of Last Resort.**" An example of that paradigm? Societal and Social programs: These, in my opinion, have not succeeded in the other Departments of the State, which have the responsibility for the challenged individual and their State provided or lack-thereof programs. Examples of who these individuals are? the mentally and homeless challenged, those addicted to non-prescriptive drugs and /or alcohol, the human trafficked, the domestically abused, etc. When these individuals do not receive the appropriate professional public assistance, service and/or protection on the front end, generally, they end up running mildly amuck of the law. Then they go down our State's rabbit hole, "**the public service of last resort:**" arrest, jail, court, punishment and obtaining a record, only to continuously repeat the cycle of arrest, incarceration, release. You must agree these individuals are separate and distinct from the violent criminals for which the jails are attuned and, for which the correctional officers are trained and have the subject expertise to handle. Only the recognition by the Legislature of these issues and how they fit across it's Departments will be able to create success within these citizens.