



# Administrative Office of the Courts

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## **Judicial Branch testimony of Amy A. Quinlan, State Court Administrator, in favor of LD 2090, An Act to Modernize and Consolidate Certain Court Facilities:**

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Amy Quinlan, and I am the State Court Administrator for the Maine Judicial Branch. I am before you today to offer testimony in favor of L.D. 2090, a bill submitted by the Judicial Branch to allow the Maine Governmental Facilities Authority to increase the maximum amount of securities that it may issue for specific allocation to the Judicial Branch. This increase is to fund new court facilities in Hancock, Somerset, and Androscoggin Counties.

A bit of history puts this bill into perspective. In 1976 the Legislature created a unified state court system, through which the Judicial Branch assumed responsibility for State court operations in all sixteen counties. Funding was provided for several aspects of the newly centralized system, but the funds ran out before the facility needs could be addressed. Thus, the resulting 1976 law required the counties to provide space for the state courts without any rent or other form of compensation. This was expected to be a short-term compromise, but the situation was never resolved. Over the years, this arrangement has led to an untenable situation: 19th century buildings occupied in great part by the State courts but owned by the counties, are in great need of modernization, and are falling into disrepair.

It once made sense for District Courts and Superior Courts to be located in separate buildings. Before the year 2000, in criminal matters and some other case types, District Court decisions could be appealed to the Superior Court. This was changed in 1999 when the law was amended; the intermediate appeal was eliminated in most cases; and the cases were rendered appealable directly to the Law Court. In

addition, effective on July 1, 2015, the criminal dockets were fully combined into the Unified Criminal Docket. With these developments, it is much more convenient and cost effective to combine the two courts into one building with one central clerk's office. Having fewer separate buildings also means that we need fewer judicial marshals to staff entry screening and we have fewer buildings to maintain and heat.

In the year 2000, the Judicial Branch was housed in 48 court facilities. Through renovation, new construction, and consolidation, we have reduced the number of facilities that require maintenance, heating, and entry screening to 31 court facilities. In recent years, we have completed court improvement projects in Machias, Rockland, Houlton, Bangor, Dover-Foxcroft, Augusta, Belfast, South Paris, and just last year, the York Judicial Center in Biddeford. All of these projects assure the public a safe, efficient, and adequate space to resolve civil disputes and adjudicate criminal cases.

There are still several courthouses over 100 years old. Over the next 6 years, we are proposing to replace the Hancock County Courthouse, renovate and add an addition to the District Court building in Skowhegan so that we can vacate the Somerset County Courthouse, and renovate a building next to the District Court in Lewiston so that we can vacate the Androscoggin County Courthouse in Auburn.

I have attached to this testimony descriptions of each of the proposed buildings, complete with the proposed site locations, project scope, courthouse features, and projected budget. All the new courthouses will have secure entry screening and separate circulation routes for staff, the public, and incarcerated defendants; ADA compliant buildings; secure prisoner holding facilities and video-conferencing equipment; full sprinkler and HVAC systems; adequate meeting rooms and mediation spaces; an adequate number of state-of-the-art courtrooms; wiring and infrastructure to accommodate our new case management system and other modern technology; and accessible parking.

**Hancock County:** The Hancock County Courthouse was built in 1931 and later renovated to add an additional courtroom for the District Court. In spite of these renovations, the courthouse has numerous safety, space, electrical, and mechanical deficiencies that have negatively affected court operations and public service for many years. It does not provide separate and safe circulation for the staff, the prisoners, and the public. There are insufficient conference rooms and courtrooms to accommodate the docket in Hancock County. There are only a few parking spaces

available to the public, so citizens using the courthouse have to park and walk a distance to access the building.

We propose to build a new Hancock Judicial Center at 120 Surry Road in Ellsworth, consisting of 4 courtrooms (2 jury and 2 non-jury) with a consolidated clerk's office, at least 8 conference rooms, and 125 public parking spaces. The building will be 2 1/2 stories and about 64,000 square feet. The Hancock Judicial Center will cost about \$55M to design and construct.

**Somerset County:** Somerset County is currently served by two courthouses in Skowhegan: the Skowhegan District Courthouse and the Somerset County Superior Courthouse, another of our aging and obsolete courthouses. Neither of these two buildings alone provides sufficient space to meet the present and future operational needs of Somerset County. The Judicial Branch proposes to renovate and add an addition to the Skowhegan District Courthouse and return the Somerset County Superior Court building to the County, so that we will consolidate court operations into one building.

The proposed site of the new Somerset County Judicial Center will be at 55 Court Street in Skowhegan. We will be adding to the existing courthouse a 30,000 square foot three-story addition. It will feature 4 courtrooms (2 jury and 2 non-jury), at least 8 public conference rooms, and an enlarged area for a clerk's office. We expect the courthouse design and construction to cost \$45M.

**Androscoggin County:** Androscoggin County is presently served by the District Court on Lisbon Street in Lewiston and the aging Androscoggin County Courthouse in Auburn. We propose to consolidate the two facilities by adding on to the District Court building and returning the space occupied by the Androscoggin Superior Court building in Auburn back to the County. The resulting facility will be located on Lisbon Street in downtown Lewiston and be known as the Androscoggin Judicial Center.

To build this facility, we are in the process of acquiring the building at 55 Lisbon Street, next door to the present District Court. We plan to gut the building and remodel it to add 3 additional courtrooms (2 jury and 1 non-jury) to the five courtrooms already in the District Court building. We will be adding at least 8 more public conference rooms and, if space allows, an additional room for dispositional conferences and hearings. We expect the courthouse design and construction to cost about \$105M.

**Sequence of Projects:**

- Hancock County Judicial Center: July 2025 – December 2026
- Somerset County Judicial Center: April 2026 – December 2027
- Androscoggin County Judicial Center: April 2027 – October 2029

We ask that you amend LD 2090 to remove the \$1.00 placeholder amount and replace it with the figure of \$205,000,000.00. Because of the terms of the commencement of the projects and the financing, no debt service appropriation is required until FY 2026.

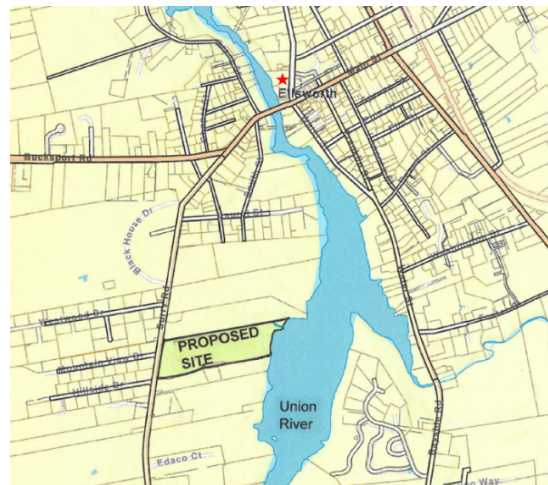
In closing, we very much appreciate the support of the Legislative and Executive Branches in recent years as we have tried to address the fundamental lack of facility resources that the Judicial Branch has experienced since the 1970s. The projects in Bangor, Augusta, Houlton, Dover-Foxcroft, Machias, Biddeford, South Paris and Belfast have increased safety for litigants and court staff, provided dignified spaces to address these most crucial and often painfully personal disputes, and greatly increased the efficient operations of the Judicial Branch.

We believe the proposal presented in L.D. 2090, like the ones in previous years, will provide the residents of Hancock, Somerset, and Androscoggin Counties with modern, safe, efficient, and adequate court facilities for decades to come. I am happy to answer any questions or supply any other information you require to act on this proposal.

## Attachment to testimony on LD 2090

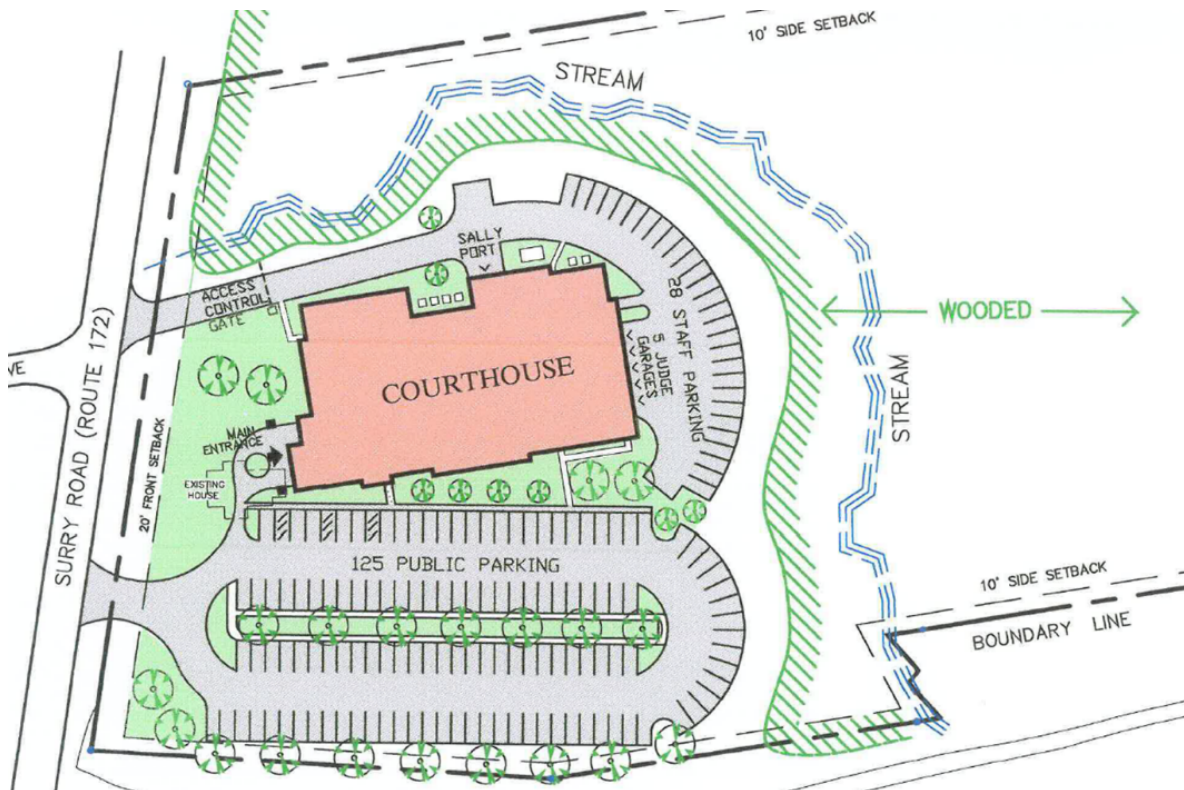
### Hancock Judicial Center (HJC)

- Proposed Site Location & Description
  - 120 Surry Road (Rte. 172), Ellsworth
  - 0.9 miles from existing courthouse and City Center
  - 17.9 acres
  - 350' road frontage
  - mostly undeveloped with sloping views to Union River
  - 3-phase electric
  - City water/sewer
  - traffic study
  - surveyed
  - environmental inventory (wetlands, vernal pool check) completed
  - sidewalk to within 500 yards (City open to extending)
  - stormwater mitigation feasible onsite
  - Neighborhood zoning
  - Commercial (Café, Auto Repair, Estate Planning) and Residential abutters (Single and Multi-Family)
  - existing Single-Family home, vacant





- Project Scope
  - Remove existing single-family residence, develop ~7 acres nearest to road into 64k sqft, 2 ½ story, 4-courtroom Hancock Judicial Center



- Courthouse Features
  - 4 courtrooms (2 jury, 2 non-jury), minimum 8 conference rooms
  - 125 public and 33 staff parking spaces
  - dispositional conference room
  - ample public circulation with southern exposure
  - fully accessible throughout with on-grade entry
  - natural light with exterior views from all courtrooms
  - private clerk's transaction window

- Public, Staff and Prisoner full separation of circulation
  - DA suite
  - Prisoner holding on each floor and basement Sallyport
  - Prisoner/Attorney interview room for each courtroom
  - lactation room
  - Single User restrooms
  - Security locker room
  - EV charging stations for Public and Staff
  - Budget
    - property acquisition = \$875k
    - courthouse design & construction = \$55M
- Somerset County Judicial Center (SCJC)**
- Proposed Site Location & Description
    - 55 Court Street, Skowhegan
    - 0.21 acres
    - within sight of the Somerset County Courthouse
    - between District Court parking lot and existing building
    - City water/sewer
    - 3-phase electric
    - existing Single-Family home, vacant





- Project Scope
  - remove existing single-family residence and develop entire property into 30k sqft, 3-story addition (includes basement) to Skowhegan District Court
  - renovate existing District Court to support increased staffing and altered circulation
  - incorporate Somerset Superior Court into Skowhegan District Court to create the Somerset County Judicial Center
  - expand clerk's office to support increased staff





- Renovated Courthouse Features
  - 4 courtrooms (2 jury, 2 non-jury)
  - minimum 8 public conference rooms
  - Public, Staff and Prisoner full separation of circulation
  - dispositional conference room
  - private clerk's transaction window
  - DA suite
  - Prisoner holding on each floor and basement Sallyport
  - Prisoner/Attorney interview room on each floor
  - expanded entry screening and public circulation
  - lactation room
  - fully accessible throughout with on-grade entry
  - Single User restrooms
  - EV charging stations
  - secure, isolated parking for judges and staff
  - Security locker room
- Budget
  - property acquisition = \$300k
  - courthouse design & construction = \$45M

## Androscoggin Judicial Center (AJC)

- Proposed Site Location and Description
  - 55 Lisbon Street, Lewiston & Rights to parking deck at 21 Canal St.
  - 0.26 acres
  - adjacent to existing Lewiston District Court
  - City water/sewer
  - 3-phase electric
  - ample public parking nearby
  - within Lewiston City Center
  - 0.6 miles from County Courthouse
  - adjacent to Lewiston's Riverfront Island development area
  - mostly vacant commercial building with two active leases



- Project Scope
  - gut and rebuild building aligning floors with Lewiston District Court
  - create circulation for Prisoner transport between existing Sallyport and proposed addition
  - create Staff and Public circulation pathways on each floor between buildings
  - expand clerk's office to support increased staff



- Renovated Courthouse Features (new building only)
  - 3 courtrooms (2 jury, 1 non-jury), 1 hearing room
  - minimum 8 public conference rooms
  - dispositional conference room
  - DA suite
  - Prisoner holding on each floor and basement Sallyport
  - Prisoner/Attorney interview room for each jury courtroom
  - expanded entry screening and public circulation
  - lactation room
  - Single User restrooms
  - Security locker room
  - EV charging stations for staff
  - secure, isolated parking for judges
- Budget
  - Property Acquisition = \$975k
  - Courthouse Design & Construction = \$105M (2027)

