

Town of Bradley



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November 12, 2025

Scott Adkins
Penobscot County
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Dear County Administrator Scott Atkins, Commissioners Andre Cushing, Daniel Tremble, and David Marshall

Due to the limited time available for preparation ahead of the November 18, 2025, Penobscot County Budget Meeting, this message is being sent to you via email. A copy of this letter will also be mailed to all members of the Penobscot County Budget Committee, and an effort will be made to email those members directly.

Please allow us to introduce ourselves. Collectively, we are the **Bradley Town Council**, and individually, we are:

- **Mark Ketch**, Council Chair
- **Duane Lugdon**, Councilor
- **Laurence Wade**, Councilor
- **Charles Clemons**, Councilor
- **James Hatch**, Councilor

We are presenting this communication today out of a mounting concern for the construction of and the potential impacts of the 2026 Proposed County Budget now under consideration. Councilor Lugdon has also served in the past as an appointee to the Penobscot County Budget Committee in the years of 2019, 2020, and 2021. Since none of us is currently serving on the Budget Committee, we have access to only what we can consume out of the media reports and the documents posted publicly on the County Website. What we can discern are the following observations:

1. The County is currently facing a stark fiscal dilemma of as much as a \$5 million (approximate) deficit that has accumulated since at least FY 2021.
2. The major contributor to the deficit has been expenditures above and beyond the designated Budget line item(s) for the operation of the Penobscot County Jail. We are unclear which reserve fund accounts were tapped as the source of the over-budget needs.
3. The County Leadership is currently advocating the recovery of monies, again spent down from the reserve account(s) over 4 fiscal cycles, by means of a single County Fiscal year and a rather obvious huge tax increase that will ensue for the 2026 FY.
4. The County Tax increase currently under consideration equates to an approximate 20%+ increase to the Municipalities over their current 2025 Budget line item for County Tax.
5. The proposed 2026 County Budget, if promulgated in its current state according to reports, would result in HUGE hardships for all Penobscot County Municipalities. Here in the small town of Bradley, we operate on a **July 1-June 30 Fiscal year**, and our budget for the Second half of **Calendar 2026** and the First Half of **Calendar 2027** will be getting underway in the next several months. It is estimated

that the proposed increase for the County tax, if the plan proceeds as, it is presently being discussed in the media, our own Budget for our cycle (June 2026 through June 2027) would cause our line item attributable to the County Tax to balloon by approximately \$50,000.00 **over our current 2025-2026 Fiscal Budget line item for the Tax to the County.**

Having laid out the factual premises, as we currently understand them above, we want to assure you that, as Municipal Council Members having Budgetary responsibility, we understand the sometimes-necessary deficit spending that occurs in all public budgeting entities. Unanticipated and unforeseen needs occasionally arise in every governmental Fiscal Year from Washington DC down through to even the smallest of Maine Municipalities. It is sometimes an exercise in futility to control the ever-increasing costs of responsible governance.

Here in Penobscot County, we have long been plagued by the growth of expenses related to the administration of law enforcement. We knew in those years that Councilor Lugdon served on the Budget Committee that the need for a new County Jail was both growing exponentially and that it was becoming more imperative to begin containing the exorbitant cost of housing inmates. Along with the growing need to house inmates at other facilities, due to overcrowding in our own Jail, we have had to contend with the overall inflationary influences that surround normal expenses incurred in operating and maintaining our aging Jail in Bangor. On top of simply housing inmates in the County Jail, we contend with the inflationary aspects of providing for their meals, safety, and well-being while being held. I assure you that, as Town Administrators, we are not under any illusions about the "need".

Our message to you today is to serve up an opinion that you are undoubtedly hearing from other folks around the County. Often, like yourselves, the County's Municipal taxpayers have little control over the inflationary costs that the County governance has been experiencing. All the taxpayers can do is continue to hope for good management of the County and then share what is imposed collectively upon them by the budgeting process.

The current theme expressed for solutions in the broad media and attributed to County officials is what drives this communication to you. We see reports after reports that suggest how the County leadership is leaning toward a recovery from cost overruns over 4-5 successive years can be accomplished in just **ONE BUDGETARY YEAR**. We must lean in with our own opinion and concern that an idea of that kind, if factually based, is altogether astounding, preposterous, and beyond what can be called reasonable at best. Further, if we can be so bold and beg your indulgence, we would respectfully describe it as an **UTTERLY IRRESPONSIBLE** concept. There simply **HAS** to be a better way, and we must find it or face public recriminations like we have not encountered in many years, if at all.

So here are just our impressions of several potential themes to begin reforming our county governance and the current budgetary crisis:

- A. The cost of deficit spending from Reserve accounts can be considered in terms of the **PAIN** that is incurred in rebuilding them. **The effort to recover Reserve funds that were expended to cover excess budget expenditures in recent years should be stretched over multiple budget years and not just one year.** We believe that a period of not less than a 7–10-year recovery would be reasonable and prudent while concurrently structuring the annual budgets in a way that covers the real expense, WITHOUT dipping into funds that were undesignated. While we hesitate to advocate for **SHORT-TERM** borrowing or bonding at favorable rates to begin the process of replacing the Reserve funds that were dipped into for cost overruns, we would suggest that it may be the better solution than burdening the Municipalities in the way that is being suggested in various sources. In

short, the overall mission of covering current costs proficiently and replenishing what was used to cover over-budget expenses may have to include additional taxation, but ***it cannot be such a large lump*** that County residents must swallow it all at once. The better logic would be to raise a little now through taxes, borrow to secure enough reserve funding to cover unanticipated operating costs if we must and then SLOWLY rebuild the Reserve funds over time, just as they were built before spending them down in the recent 4-5 years. Inordinate and irresponsible lifts in the County Tax will inevitably lead to the rejection of Municipal Budgets that taxpayers, understandably, are not going to entertain.

- B. The County currently focuses on achieving more State resources to alleviate the cost of a new County Jail, but, quite honestly, it may just be that the effort is anemic in demonstrable ways. It should double the focus and be more insistent upon concepts to bring public pressure on the Legislature to achieve it. Perhaps a public **BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION** comprised of County Leadership, Municipal Managers, and Municipal Leadership, is in order and can be developed to help bring the dilemma into a more bright daylight. A reasonable and manageable concept of this kind might raise the “noise” that will be needed in the Legislature to bring about its collective receptivity to having the State share a larger portion of the cost of Law Enforcement and the housing of inmates who violate the Law. Frankly, this is becoming an obvious need in not only our County but also entirely around the rest of the State as well if we are diligently paying attention to the various media feeds.
- C. And this brings us to a long-held thought and belief that may admittedly be only incidentally associated with the current dilemma. We believe that in the long term, there should be an effort to expand the number of Penobscot County Commissioners. The current makeup of the Commissioners was dictated by the Legislature many years ago under Title 30-A Chapter 1 of the State Statutes. Penobscot County is a large entity with a population of approximately 150,000 citizens, and yet it is essentially governed at the top of its government by only **ONE** ADMINISTRATOR and **THREE** Commissioners with responsibility for huge geographic areas and populations. By comparison, our little town of Bradley, with a population just over 1550 residents, is, like the vast majority of similar Towns, served by a Town Manager and 5 Town Councilors. Ideally, in our estimation and for what it is worth, the number of Commissioners governing Penobscot County should be expanded to **FIVE** or better yet **SEVEN** Commissioners and thereby ensure that there is a greater diversity of opinion, leadership, and oversight. Overall, an expansion would be more conducive to governing responsibly. Let us say that we are cognizant that expanding the number from 3 Commissioners to a more representative number would not be a simple task. But we believe that it can be accomplished either through the State Legislature’s cooperation or through the adoption of a COUNTY COMMISSION concept of Government such as enabled by Title 30-A Chapter 11 of the Maine Statutes. It might well take three years or more to get it ultimately done, through a bit of diligent toil and trouble, but it is indeed worth doing and would result in better representation and a better sharing of responsibilities in Penobscot County Governance.
- D. Finally - The elephant in the room is obviously how we are going to fund a new County Jail and thereby contain the cost of inmate housing rather than the high cost of housing them under someone else’s roof. Like your own opinions, which are a matter of public record, we believe that the State should bear a significantly higher share of that burden if not the entire brunt of the need. The effort to have the State stand up to what we believe is its duty in this regard is going to take a significant concerted effort of everyone in the County to make it happen. We fail to see how the

County can bear that cost alone and can only advocate that we must continue to be vigilant and insistent that the State become more responsible for the enforcement of the law and the housing of inmates.

We apologize for the exhausting length of this communication. It is not often that folks like us can ask the attention of folks like you, and the subject at issue requires lengthy explanation.

Communication with the Bradley Town Council may be directed through our Town Manager, Melissa Doane. Any correspondence requiring our attention will be promptly forwarded to us by her. Ms. Doane and possibly a member of the Bradley Town Council will be in attendance at the November 18, 2025, Penobscot County Budget Meeting.

With great respect for the dedication you have in leading Penobscot County, we look forward to hearing from you at your earliest possible moment, and we remain,

Sincerely,

The Bradley Town Council

Chairman Mark Ketch

Councilor Duane Lugdon

Councilor Laurence Wade

Councilor Charles Clemons

Councilor James Hatch

Cc: Melissa Doane, Town Manager