

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



7 Pullo Rd, Wilton, ME 04294

February 14, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Criminal Justice and Public Safety: my name is Jan Collins and I live in Wilton. I am assistant Director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition.

MPAC's purpose is to reduce Maine's use of incarceration by creating a criminal justice system that is ethical, humane, and restorative in nature. In doing so we will create stronger safer communities.

We can all look back on our lives and note events that shaped us, maybe even changed us. There are two in my life. The first is my fathers incarceration. When my father went to jail, we lost our car and our home. My father was our soul support. His incarceration plunged us into abject poverty. My mother was left with four children under the age of five and no place to go. My uncle had a small plywood trailer that he hauled around to county fairs. It had a set of bunks and no running water. It became our home for the summer. My mother tucked my sister and I in at either end of the top bunk and she shared the bottom bunk with my two little brothers.

Had my father been offered treatment for his alcoholism instead of incarceration, my life would have been very different. When someone goes to jail the whole family goes to jail.

The second event was the death of my grandson ... three days after child protective visited and declared the home safe. The underfunded safety net has big holes in it.

Prisons in the US have a 65-70% recidivism rate. That is a failure rate of 70%. Yet, we continue to shovel huge amounts of money into a failing system. We know what works - education, job training, programming, mental health services, and housing. All of these programs keep people out of jail, and insure their success upon release and yet they remain grossly underfunded. While corrections budgets sail through, services that actually make communities safer and help people thrive languish on the appropriations table.

This years budget has an additional \$45 million for corrections and only \$3.5 million for mental health. Let us reverse that, let us put the money where it will do the most good. Jails have been begging us for a decade to provide mental health services in the community because jails are not trained or equipped for the influx of people with untreated mental health diagnoses. **There are now ten times more individuals with Serious Mental Illnesses (SMI) in prisons and jails than there are in state mental hospitals [3].**

We are pushing people to the deep end of the pool. We should not be surprised that they are drowning. Our investments should be in prevention.

We cannot afford to look away.

I have lots of suggestions on how we could save money in corrections. I would welcome your questions.

Jan M. Collins

People with Mental health Diagnoses are Overrepresented in Prisons and Jails
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5397789/>

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2. Prins SJ, Draper L, Center J, John D. *Improving outcomes for people with mental illnesses under community corrections supervision: A guide to research-informed policy and practice*. 2009.

3. Torrey EF, Kennard AD, Eslinger D, et al. More mentally ill persons are in jails and prisons than hospitals: A survey of the states. Treatment Advocacy Center Arlington, VA; 2010.