

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



Monday February 1, 2021

Greetings: Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and Members of the Criminal Justice Committee

Introductions:

Joseph Jackson, Director Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition

Jan Collins, Assistant Director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition

Our Mission:

MPAC's mission is to support Maine's incarcerated citizens, their families, and friends, in their struggle with Maine's criminal justice system. Our purpose is to reduce Maine's use of incarceration by creating a criminal justice system that is ethical, humane, and restorative in nature.

Who we partner with: civil liberties, restorative justice, mental health, drug reform, homelessness, immigrants rights, women's rights, gender equity, disability rights, hospice, victims rights, and others including the Department of Corrections with whom we are in regular contact.

Many of our major concerns parallel those in the 2019 [Justice Reinvestment Report](#) which is a blueprint for change in Maine's Criminal Justice System:

1. Maine's jails and prisons are filled with people who could be better served in a medical setting. It is less expensive to place a person with substance use disorder in a treatment bed than a jail cell, yet we continue to place them in jail. The AMHI consent decree released 1200 people suffering from mental health issues into their communities without adequate support services. Coincidentally, our prison population has risen by 1200 individuals since the decree.
2. In 20-21, the juvenile corrections budget will spend \$12 million dollars on community corrections and \$18 million dollars for Long Creek. Long Creek serves a population of less than 30 children on a daily basis. Children and their communities would both benefit if those funds were diverted to community support systems instead of it being spent to lock kids up.
3. Maine's Public Defender's Office is understaffed leading to [inadequate representation](#) with underpaid, insufficiently trained attorneys for Maine's poor. This has created a two tiered legal system..one for those who can afford their own attorney and another for those who cannot. No additional funds have been set aside in the governor's budget to remedy this violation of the Sixth amendment.
4. Cash Bail represents an insurmountable hurdle for most poor Mainers. Personal recognizance bail has risen from \$500(already unattainable) to \$2500 in some cases.

5. Programming and reentry services are lacking in jails and prison, leading to high recidivism rates and a cycle of despair.
6. Maine has no parole. There is no reward for those who work diligently to reform. We keep people in prison long after there is any risk to the community.
7. It is time for compassionate release for the dying. Our crime rates are declining, arrests are down, yet our prison population continues to rise (with the exception of this year of Covid when many courts were closed for extended periods.) Longer sentences mean our prisons have a disproportionate number of the aged. It is time to release the elderly, infirm and dying so they can be cared for in a licensed long term care facility.
8. Covid-19 continues to be a ticking time bomb. Thirty percent of corrections staff have declined the vaccine. There is no plan for vaccinating inmates even those who qualify under 1A standards - over age 70 with chronic medical conditions in a congregate setting.
9. The Justice Reinvestment report indicates a pattern of institutional racism that leads to higher proportions of indigenous peoples and people of color being arrested, adjudicated, and sentenced to longer terms than white inmates.

Ninety-five percent of all inmates have a release date. They will be returning to our communities. We must return them restored, rehabilitated, and whole.

<https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ME-Launch-Presentation1.pdf>

<https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/JR-in-Maine-second-presentation1.pdf>

https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ME-Third-Presentation_12.11.19_FINAL.pdf

Questions - Thank-you for inviting us to speak before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee.