

# Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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## **Testimony to the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety 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:

Good afternoon. My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen and a person in long-term recovery.\* I am here testifying against the proposed budget on behalf of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. Our goal is to promote restorative practices to increase public safety and the health of the community.

I am sure you hear a lot about “Evidence Based Practices” when people are asking you for money. I know a little about this concept since before I destroyed my life and those around me I was a sociology and criminology professor.

Let’s start with incarceration. **Incarceration is not an evidence-based practice.**

Just one year from release, almost 20% are back in custody and three years later, it’s around 30%. Over time, more than 50% return. 42% of the DOC admissions last year were returnees. This is not effective.

Each returnee costs us money every year. On and on.

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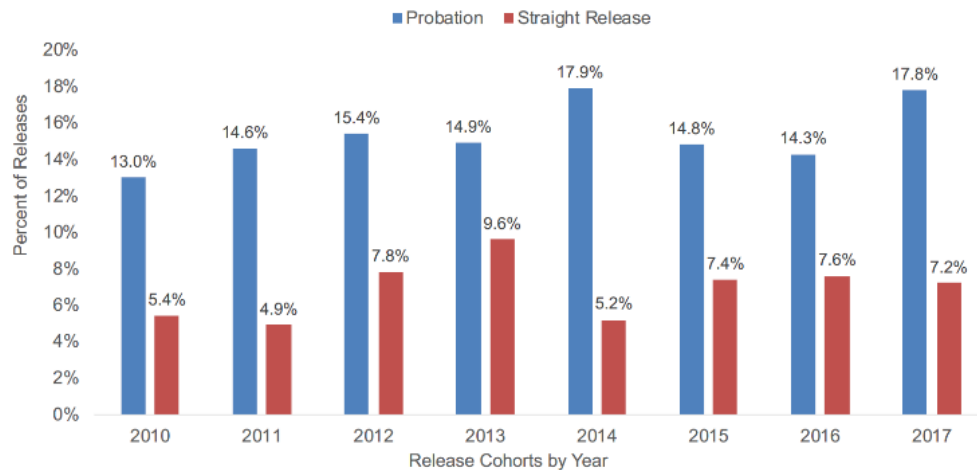
\* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.

The purpose of intervention is so that it doesn't happen again. Incarceration doesn't do that. Programs and treatment do.

Nearly one-fifth of people released onto probation supervision in Maine return to prison within one year.



One-Year Return-to-Custody Rates by Release Type, 2010–2017



Source: Ryan Thornell and James Tanner, Return to Custody Report Three Year Post Release 2010-2014 (Augusta, Maine: Maine Department of Corrections, 2018) <https://www.maine.gov/corrections/quality-assurance/Return%20to%20Custody%202010-2014.pdf>

From Council of State Governments, First Presentation to the Maine Commission to Improve the Sentencing, Supervision, Incarceration and Management of Prisoners, October 3, 2019

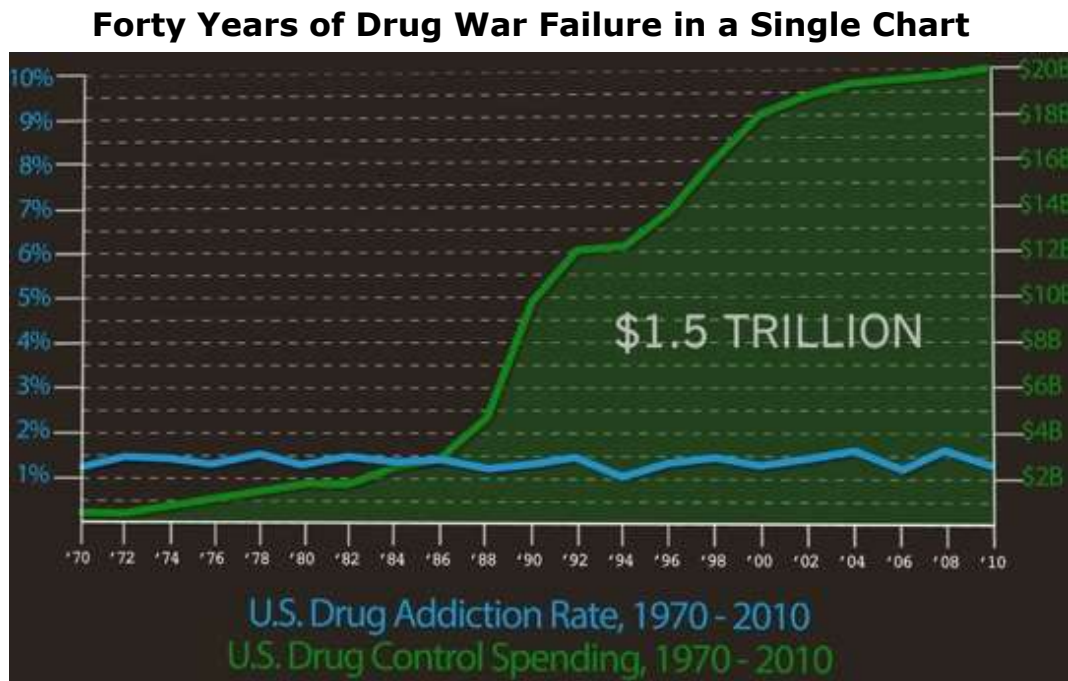
I'm sure you have heard the old Chinese saying: "Give a family a fish, and you'll feed them for a day. Teach a family to fish, and you've fed them for a lifetime." Translated to corrections, that reads: "Put a man in jail and he will be back again. Teach him how to stay out of jail and you will have saved a ton of money."

Programs and treatment are not a luxury, they are the route to success. Give the DOC enough money to actually help men and women stay out. That's an evidence-based practice. In other words, it works!

And a significant investment could dramatically and permanently reduce the corrections budget.

One obvious source of funding is the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency in the Public Safety budget. The **MDEA** is another **NOT evidence-based** program. There is no evidence that the MDEA

has reduced drug use. Yet they are requesting a substantial increase in funding.



<https://reason.com/2012/10/11/forty-years-of-drug-war-failure-in-a-sin/>

In truth, funding the MDEA has diverted attention and money that could have been used for treatment, harm reduction and other interventions. In this sense, funding the **MDEA has probably cost lives.**

Eliminating the MDEA would free up more than \$13.6 million. Based on the experience of other states and countries I can confidently promise you that eliminating it won't increase drug use.

If we **invest that money** in evidence-based treatment, other intervention and programs in the DOC and elsewhere, it will undoubtedly **save lives.**

Thank you for your consideration and support.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.