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March 4, 2023

Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: LD 576 - Repeal of 15 MRSA §815

To Whom It May Concern,

I have been an attorney for the past fifteen (15) years and the large majority of my work is in criminal defense. For the last few years, my practice is has been focused on doing the Lawyer of the Day shifts. I do at least four walk-in arraignment shifts every month.

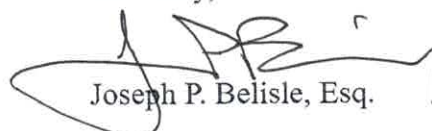
I have read the letter from fellow defense attorney Kaylee Folster and agree with the points that she has made. I will try not to tread that same ground too heavily.

Almost every shift I have at least one person express extreme relief that they are not going to jail. Since they are no longer receiving an offer letter from District Attorney's office, they are left to 1) either wonder and worry, 2) look up the charge themselves and see that their class D or E misdemeanor comes with a maximum of 364 days and 6 months, and then worry some more (as they often don't know that most misdemeanors are not going to come with jail time), or 3) go hire an attorney to advise them on their charges, and then probably worry less, but be out \$500 or more.

Overall, it's my opinion that this law treats grown men and women as children, incapable of making informed decisions about their own lives. At their arraignment, every person is shown a fifteen minute video detailing their rights and options and the negative effects pleading guilty could have. They are all provided a free opportunity to meet with an experienced defense attorney to discuss their options. A judge makes sure that they know what they are doing. Instead of treating people as adults capable (and having the right) to represent themselves, this law assumes that a letter from a District Attorney could override all that additional information.

Thank you for your time and attention to these matters.

Sincerely,


Joseph P. Belisle, Esq.