



Restorative Justice Project Maine

12 April 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Rep. Salisbury and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

I am Jay Davis, a resident of Belfast, and I write in strong support of LD 1204, which enables incarcerated residents to continue receiving MaineCare while in jail or prison. I speak for the undersigned members of the Restorative Justice Project Maine Legislative Committee.

Here's a story I am very familiar with that underscores the problems with county facilities having control over what can become major health issues. My friend Steve Williams was a resident of the Maine Coastal Regional Reentry Center in Belfast in 2022 when he developed a swelling in his mouth. The MCRRC staff allowed him to have a biopsy of the growth on his tongue. The procedure showed tongue cancer and a warning from the physician in Boston that the cancer was aggressive and fast-moving.

Steve isn't shy about sticking up for himself and he asked constantly for follow-up treatment, but he was continually put off. At one point he called me and I went to the center and heard him describe both the pain and discomfort he was feeling and the anger that was growing as he received no treatment.

This went on for months despite further contact from the physician that the cancer was dangerous and growing.

As committee members are aware, county jails have legal responsibilities for the health of inmates. They are also beholden to taxpayers who do not like to hear of medical expenses that can reach tens of thousands of dollars.

As Steve's condition worsened, the Re-entry Center supervisors made two key decisions. First, they agreed that Steve needed immediate medical care, though this decision came months after the initial diagnosis. And second, they understood that the best way to pay for the needed operation was to release Steve early and let MaineCare, which Steve had before he entered MCRRC, pick up the tab.

He was released 12 days early, had his MaineCare restored immediately and was in Boston the next day for surgery. That was a year ago, and he is recovering, but he is

Restorative Justice Project

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Restorative Justice Project
Maine

still alive.

If Steve's MaineCare was continued during his stay at MCRRC there's no question in my mind or his that his cancer would have been caught at an earlier stage and his recovery would have been shorter and quicker. Enough said.

We are aware that there are abuses of MaineCare that are worrisome, including the over-prescribing of pain-killing and mind-influencing drugs. We hope those abuses are addressed. But LD 1204 will place the responsibility for health care costs where it belongs. Just ask Steve Williams.

Jay Davis
Tim Hughes
Sarah Mattox
Dr. Art Jones

Members of RJP Maine Legislative Committee
Belfast

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Tim Hughes
Belfast
LD 1204

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