

Cheryl Dearman Mills  
Wells

Senator Pinny Beebe-Center, Representative Suzanne Salisbury and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

I am writing in support of LD 1863 "An Act to Facilitate the Provision of Medically Appropriate Levels of Care for Clients of Correctional Facilities "

I have had the privilege of visiting monthly with women at the Women's Center at the Maine Correctional Center for the past four years.. During those visits the women residents share their successes and the challenges they face living in a MDOC facility. Several of the women I have come to know are incarcerated for the remainder of their lives. One of them died this year and one died last year at MCC following several months of end of life health.

I would like to speak to the case of the woman who died inside in 2022. My appreciation was extended to the administration of the Women's Center for allowing the resident's sister to spend considerable time with her during her last months. I was also deeply moved by the love expressed and care given to her by her fellow residents and some of the staff.

I was told that the resident's wish, I will refer to her as R, was to die in the facility with those who cared about her, who had in effect become family. For some time she was cared for in what I believe is the sick bay, near the kiosk where the officers are stationed. However, it was reported that for the last week of her life the resident was moved back to her walk. It was reported to me by the women who were helping care for her that the room she was moved to was filthy and they cleaned it themselves before R was moved in. A small group of residents divided into shifts and stayed with her around the clock after that. They reported that she was often not given her medications, was not turned and was left soiled and that staff exhibited less than compassionate care.

Having accompanied both my father, many years ago, and my mother in law, two years ago, through their end of life times I know how important it is to have adequate, consistent and timely professional medical care and the comfort and advocacy of family, whether biological or of the heart. R was fortunate to have the latter but lacked the former.

Regardless of what actions brought someone to be residing in a MDOC facility, humane care is their right and the DOC's responsibility. It is my position that residents of Maine's DOC facilities must have adequate, consistent and timely professional medical care at all times. I support LD 1863 so that it is guaranteed at the end of their life. Licensing is crucial to ensuring that they do. No business or agency can be allowed to hold itself responsible for self-oversight. State licensing standards are the minimal that should be adhered to for any resident of the state of Maine, inside or outside of the DOC. If a prison cannot offer a licensed facility for nursing home or end of life care then that care must be provided for outside in the community. At this point the resident of a DOC facility is no longer any threat to the community and if desired should be provided on the outside in either a licensed facility or at home with professional end of life care.

As Mahatma Ghandi said "the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." Individuals needing nursing home and/or end of life care certainly are some of our most vulnerable. May the state of Maine not be found wanting in this measurement.