



January 17, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change.

We join you **in support of LD 1975, An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs**, and thank Representative Crafts for sponsoring this important bill.

Four interrelated facts drive our commitment to this bill:

1. **The majority of incarcerated women in Maine have a history of trauma.**¹ For example, nationwide, incarcerated women are 30 times more likely to have experienced rape than women outside of prison.²
2. **Women with a history of trauma are significantly more likely to develop substance use and misuse,**³
3. **Drug crimes are fueling an increase in incarceration among Maine women.** Three of four women in prison (72%) are there on drug and theft charges.⁴
4. The number of women incarcerated in Maine has grown almost ten times in the last two decades. In 2002, there were only 25 women in Maine's state prison. In two decades, that number has grown almost ten times, to approximately 220⁵, and the number of women incarcerated at the county level has grown substantially as well. Women now make up almost one in four jail admissions in Maine (while male jail admissions have declined).

¹ Maine Dept. Of Corrections. (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://www.maine.gov/corrections/Evidence-based-Programming-Treatment.htm>

² Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey, Truman & Langton, 2012. U.S. Department of Justice.

³ Lotzin, et al. (2019). Profiles of Childhood Trauma in Women With Substance Use Disorders and Comorbid Posttraumatic Stress Disorders. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. Retrieved from <https://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2019.00674>.

⁴ Neuman, D. (2019). 72% of women in Maine's prisons are there on drug-related charges. *Maine Beacon*. Retrieved from <https://mainebeacon.com/72-of-women-in-maines-prisons-are-there-on-drug-related-charges/>

⁵ Maine Public. (2019). As Prison Population Grows DOC Plans to Relocate Women. Retrieved from <https://www.mainepublic.org/post/prison-population-grows-maines-doc-plans-relocate-women-long-creek>

In short – while people have their own unique experiences and paths, the average incarcerated woman in Maine is a trauma survivor who struggles with substance use. Those experiences are almost certainly connected.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Trauma and drug misuse are twin public health crises in Maine, and our current response is creating an additional crisis of over-incarceration, which disproportionately impacts women and girls from marginalized communities⁶. Addressing these harms through punitive, incarceration-based responses perpetuates a cycle of violence that is harming our families and communities. It is time to acknowledge that there are better, safer, more holistic ways to address these challenges, and to redirect our energy and resources to meeting those challenges to meet the real needs of Mainers. This bill seeks to do just that.

We hope you will vote Ought to Pass.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague
Maine Women's Lobby

⁶ Women experience violence while incarcerated, and incarceration and subsequent criminal records increase the barriers to employment, housing, safety net services, and education. Incarceration also disrupts family connections, inflicting trauma on another generation. It also disproportionately affects women and girls from communities who are already oppressed or disenfranchised, who are more likely to be incarcerated. For example, the highest rates of prison admissions in Maine are in rural counties.[#] Nationally, African-American girls are 14% of the general population nationally but 33.2% of girls detained and committed.[#] One study showed that LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming (GNC) girls are significantly more likely to be system-involved: 40% of girls in the juvenile justice system are LGBT/GNC compared to 14% of boys.[#]