

Testimony of Matthew Cushing

In OPPOSITION of LD 18, An act to allow the Department of Corrections to increase healthcare fees and use the proceeds from those fees to offset the costs of client medical care support workers.

January 26, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Hasenfus, Representative Beebe, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am Matthew Cushing. I am here today to provide testimony in strong opposition of LD 18 as it would cause harm to the residents and their families within the Maine Department of Corrections. This bill would create financial strain on residents and their families who already have disproportionately high rates of poverty. Lastly, I am also strongly opposed to LD 18 because I believe that such a practice violates the Maine Department of Corrections' own policies involving residents incurring debt.

In the spirit of transparency, I want to state that I am a resident of Maine State Prison. The healthcare I receive through the department of corrections healthcare provider (Wellpath) is the only medical treatment available to me. I would like to list some of my concerns regarding the passage of LD 18 and the effects it would have on not only the residents of the Maine Department of Corrections, but also their families.

- \$25.00 for medical services is more than most residents can afford to pay, especially at a time when the department of corrections has been eliminating paid resident positions, and wages for those paid positions when they existed were known to be predatory and known as “slave labor” wages with national campaigns against them.
- The proposed increase in costs for services will result in increased financial hardship for residents’ families because residents will be unable to pay for their basic material needs and hence be forced to rely on their families to send money into the prison; and because the increased costs will leave residents with less money to send home in support of their families. A double edge.
- The Department of Corrections’ medical services are provided by WellPath, a for-profit provider, who declared bankruptcy in December 2024, in the face of dozens of pending lawsuits filed for negligence and malpractice toward incarcerated clients. Increasing the cost residents must pay to receive services from Wellpath - the only provider option they have – and a company facing dozens of lawsuits claiming medical negligence and malpractice - is predatory and exploitative.
- Residents within MDOC are not in control of when they are scheduled to see the healthcare providers, or what those appointments are for. This bill will incur financial hardship on an already financially marginalized population. It is also necessary to point out the nebulous language of the bill. Are we to expect that residents who go to the clinic 3 times a day for their insulin are going to be charged \$25 each visit, and if not, what will be the threshold for what is charged and when?

- Increasing health care costs to offset “client medical care workers support costs”, is ostensibly burdening the same individuals who this bill is trying to offset the costs of paying. Those “client care workers” could be either the resident custodians (of which there are two and who earn \$100 a month) or residents providing peer support services as hospice workers who are unpaid care resident care workers.
- Finally, according to the Maine State Resident Handbook, policy 20.1, procedure F, Acts Prohibited, states verbatim: “Residents are prohibited from incurring **any** debt.” It seems unlikely that with the recent dispersal of a wide range of paid positions within the prison that residents will be able to avoid incurring debt while being charged \$25.00 for medical services that are not in their ability to refuse. Residents will be left with the choice of either receiving financially burdensome, subpar care from Wellpath or attempting to refuse and forgo much needed and necessary medical services due to inability to pay.

It is essential to oppose LD 18 due to the financial hardship it will cause and due to the bill’s predatory nature in targeting an already marginalized population.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition of LD 18,

Matthew Cushing