

Testimony in opposition to LD 18
to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
January 27, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford.

I am writing in opposition of LD18, An Act to Allow the Department of Corrections to Increase Health Care Fees and Use the Proceeds from Those Fees to Offset the Costs of Client Medical Care Support Workers.

This bill offends me as a resident of Maine. We fund the DOC to care for residents, and this bill would require those with the least resources, residents themselves, to pay for this care.

At a time when available resident jobs are declining, this bill would further tax residents, and their families and supporters. We should be proud of the resident workers who provide this care with professionalism and empathy. We should be enthusiastic about the rehabilitative aspects of this work for both the workers and those being cared for. We should fund this work as we should any rehabilitative or educational program.

I am also offended because the bill implies that fees will be to pay workers who actually choose to be volunteers, and the public should know that. From the bill: *“paying client workers who support medical care and related services for other clients, including, but not limited to, client workers who assist other clients receiving hospice services”*.

It is my understanding that the Hospice Care Team at Maine State Prison is a volunteer group with a commitment and set of values that I admire and aspire to. They have consistently opposed any compensation for their service, and the fact that this bill insinuates otherwise to the public is offensive. I question the motivation for all newly requested taxes on the residents by the DOC, and request transparency and volunteer reporting by the DOC of all funds that are labeled for the Resident Benefit Fund, and an accounting of the use of those funds.

Among the many other concerns I have is that residents may choose to not seek dental care or a prescribed medication in a situation that could become exponentially more serious to the resident, and end up at a much higher cost to taxpayers. Residents already pay for what minimal self care they are allowed to purchase on commissary. They could pay 3-4 times more for vitamins, soap or other hygiene products. Often we do not have control over needing a prescription or a prosthetic, and yet this bill would impose an additional tax on those needs.

I want to list pages of other examples, but for brevity I ask this of the committee. Think about all the hygiene products you use on a daily basis for self care, what they cost, and multiply that by 3. Then consider that you may be fortunate to have a job making a few dollars an hour, and how you would spend that. Then use the toothpaste that is issued by the state for 1 week and ask yourself how long you could use it for. Please consider doing all this before considering this bill placing a tax on people who are in our care.

The Mission of the Maine Department of Corrections is “Making our Communities Safer by Reducing Harm through Supportive Intervention, Empowering Change, and Restoring Lives”. Rather than supporting empowerment this bill taxes residents, and their families and friends who support their rehabilitation. This creates stress for residents and their loved ones, which is an unhealthy condition for all. This is contrary to the mission of the DOC. Their budget should reflect their priorities, and this proposed legislation does not prioritize safety, reduce harm or restore lives.

I hope you will oppose this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson
Sanford, Maine.