

Testimony in opposition to LD 45
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 LD45, An Act Allowing the Department of Corrections to Offset Some of the Costs of Technology Provided to Residents of Correctional Facilities.

My understanding is that the DOC budget contains little or no funding for rehabilitative programs like education, treatment and recreation. These programs are funded by profits made from resident purchases of commissary and communication with family and loved ones. These are monopoly corporations who are allowed to charge 3 or more times the 'standard' price of a food, clothing or hygiene item to those with the least resources to pay for them. At a time when available resident jobs are declining, this bill seeks to further tax residents, their families and supporters in order to provide rehabilitative programming. The national data on the positive rehabilitative effects of family and community communication is so compelling that electronic communications are free in the federal prison system.

Maine has an employment crisis and needs an educated and skilled workforce. We should be providing funds and resources for residents to join that workforce as soon as they reenter the community. Instead, residents who cannot afford the technology will suffer, losing out on rehabilitative opportunities and weakening family and community ties. I would like to see more public funding to educate Maine communities on the outstanding work being done by residents in educational, substance use rehabilitation, medical care and other programs. Employers should be informed of the enthusiastic educated and motivated workforce wanting to join them. That would be legislation in support of the DOC's mission.

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.