

Leo Hylton
Warren
LD 45

Hello, my name is Deborah Sachare. I am a permanent resident of Brunswick, currently out of state for graduate school. I am facilitating a pre-recorded (by phone) testimony of my partner who is currently incarcerated at Maine State Prison. Thank you.

Honorable Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Leo Hylton and I am currently incarcerated in Maine State Prison, Warren.

My testimony is neither for nor against this bill. Rather, I am writing to offer amendments to LD 45 - "An Act Allowing the Department of Corrections to Offset Some of the Costs of Technology Provided to Residents of Correctional Facilities."

I was the first incarcerated person to engage in remote work from MSP more than three years ago, I have been engaging in higher education for more than eleven years, and I have intimate knowledge of what it takes to make this possible. There is a clear and pressing need for the creation of a nonlapsing fund to offset the cost of technology provided to residents of correctional facilities. The technology infrastructure was built with private and federal grant funds, but now that infrastructure needs to be maintained and expanded according to the needs of incarcerated populations. Educational, vocational, and remote work programming are vital to the rehabilitation and preparation for a safe and successful reentry after incarceration. The statistical impacts on recidivism (return to incarceration) are strong.

Charging a fee for technology access makes sense, but it must be restricted to those of us who are engaged in remote work. People who work for prison wages, or who receive no pay at all for their work, should not be charged for trying to better themselves. This would most likely prevent people from accessing much-needed educational and vocational programming due to a lack of finances. People can be impoverished and have low-income families but still not qualify as "indigent" by DOC's definition. In reality, these fees will be paid by incarcerated students' families who are already taxed to pay for their incarceration and also pay for their loved one's existence in a carceral facility as they are able.

Therefore, protections must be established against overcharging, setting a cap on how much an incarcerated person doing remote work can be charged (not charging for any other type of technology access). This can be a set dollar amount or a maximum percentage; either way, it must not exceed a total of 25% of our income, aggregated with fines, fees, restitution, victim compensation, and room & board. A simple fix would be to transition the 10% currently being charged for Room & Board over to the new Resident Technology Fund, allowing the rest to be put towards caring for our families, communities, and saving for release. There should also be protections added against retributive, retaliatory, or frivolous removal of technology access by corrections staff: anyone being charged a fee for access shall not have their technology access removed unless there is a clear and definite breach of DOC policy or State or federal law.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. If I receive DOC approval to do so, I am happy to make myself available virtually for a work session on this bill if that would be helpful and welcomed by the Committee. Alternatively, Deborah Sachare is my partner and proxy who can facilitate my participation by phone or written responses to any questions you may have.

With respect and hope,

Leo Hylton #70199
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Again, I support the creation of a nonlapsing fund for Technology access, and I hope you will consider my amendments to restrict fees to those of us engaging in remote work only, while also putting protections in place against overcharging.