

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

LD 18 – Ought Not To Pass

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

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

January 27, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, greetings. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am a policy director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, I respectfully urge you to oppose this bill.

Current law allows the Department of Corrections to charge incarcerated people up to \$5 for each medical or dental visit and \$5 for prescriptions, medication, or prosthetic devices. LD 18 proposes, among other things, to increase this \$5 figure to \$25. This added financial burden would leave incarcerated people with fewer resources with which to successfully re-enter society. While it is true that the law includes significant exemptions from these charges,¹ the increased co-pay would still erode the meager resources of certain incarcerated people. Increased copays might also

¹ If an incarcerated person has less than \$15 in their facility account and has not received money from any sources in the six months after they received a medical procedure, device, or prescription, then they are exempt from the payment. Incarcerated people are also exempted from the payment in seven other circumstances. 34-A MRS §3031(2)(A)(1)-(8).

discourage some incarcerated people from seeking medical care, extending recovery times, and depressing the overall state of health in the facility.²

We understand that the state is facing budget shortfalls. But we urge the Department of Corrections to look to other sources to balance its budget. The difference between \$5 and \$25 might seem small to people on the outside, but that is partly because those of us who are not incarcerated benefit from many state and federal labor laws not applicable in prison. According to the Prison Policy Institute, incarcerated people in Maine prisons can expect to earn between 50 cents and \$3.50 per hour.³ Thus, a single \$25 charge might represent over a week of wages for an incarcerated person working full-time.

We urge you to vote *ought not to pass*.

Thank you for your time and attention.

² Testimony of The Prison Branch of the NAACP to the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee in Opposition to LD 18, Jan 27, 2025 (“Inmates at Maine State Prison are talking about refusing medical treatment and not seeking medical attention when they feel sick or have an injury.”).

³ Prison Policy Institute, *How much do incarcerated people earn in each state?*, Apr. 10, 2017, available at <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2017/04/10/wages/>.