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South Portland  
LD 179  
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To whom it may concern;

My name is Melissa Wright, I was raised in South Portland ME and chose to raise my own family here as well because it has always been a great small town. I would like to give you a little back round on why it is so important that we do NOT amend the Maine Bail Code to Eliminate the Class E Crime of Violation of Condition of Release. Eliminating this bill will only hurt Maine's law-abiding citizens!

Im going to take you back to June 18,2022. My husband and I were away enjoying a nice weekend away. While at dinner I received a text message which included pictures from one of my neighbors. The pictures were of the Swat Team, guns drawn all over my once quite neighborhood. Soon after reading that message, I called home where my elderly mother and five teenage/adult children were. They assured my husband and I that they were ok physically but a little shook up watching what was unfolding outside our windows. We had several dogs at that time who were scared and shaking because of the flash or smoke bombs that they were shooting into the home directly across the street. After several hours of a tense and frightening standoff, the South Portland Police Department and the Swat Team were able to arrest the person of interest 44-year-old Jonathan Geisinger on charges of felony murder.

As i mentioned above, my husband and I were several states away, and all i can say is I hope none of you ever have to go through a night like that. Feeling completely useless as we could not get back to our family. I am sure both of us aged 10 years that night.

I wish I could say that it was a one-time event, but it was not. That night opened our eyes to what would turn out to be a several year battle to get our neighborhood back to a safe place where children could return to playing in their yards safely.

Not long after i was doing some cleaning when i heard loud voices and a commotion out in front of that same house, this time two men were fighting and screaming at each other, i call 911 because school was letting out and children were walking home. While on with the dispatcher the younger of the two men started kicking the other all about his head and torso. While kicking he bent over just enough so the gun, he had tucked in the back of his pants showed. I relayed that to dispatch who confirmed they had cars on the way. While i watched and waited , the owner of the home came running out of that house with her 2 young children and she ran them thru the middle of the fight yelling at the two who were fighting to tell the "police that she was not home when this occurred" and she peeled off down the street before the police arrived. Several units arrived and they spoke with all involved and an arrest was made (please note that the gun was hidden before they got here). So, the Cumberland County Jail released them within hours and both parties returned to the home.

My husband and I installed cameras that covered all angles of our property after that incident. Which was good because it was not but a day or two later when another one of the occupants of that house ventured off their property, this time onto mine. Luckily, i happened to be walking downstairs and looked at the monitor that showed our property and my heart dropped! On one of the screens i could see a man who was attempting to get into my back yard next to my garage where one of my children were working on a project. I took off running for the garage . Whether it was the sound of me running from the house or the spotlights that came on when the camera picked him up, i do not know but he took off running. Again, we had to call the South Portland Police, but at this time the Cumberland County Jail would not accept new inmates unless they considered them violent. Over the next couple of days this same individual Justin Digaetano aggressively approached two of my sons' girlfriends as

they were trying to enter our home. He was clearly under the influence, stumbling and slurring his speech but still running after them. They were both able to get into my home before he could catch up to them. Mind you this is two separate instances on two separate occasions. We notified law enforcement but by the time they could get here he had left the neighborhood. The officers came back a couple of times but were not able to see him. Fast forward a little while and Mr. Digaetano did return. This time in a U-Haul pickup truck. I remember this date October 27, 2022, because he made the news this time. He had taken the police on an hour long highspeed chase in the U-Haul truck crashing into other vehicles and damaging property along the way. They did finally catch him, and he was charged with reckless driving, aggravated driving, driving under the influence, disobeying an officer, driving after suspension, conduct after an accident and resisting arrest. This man already had warrants out on him in various places. He served time, but it was not long enough. He was arrested again on 11/26/2024 this time for DUI, driving after suspension, CARRYING or SELLING weapons. Why is he out of jail? Are we waiting for him to Kill someone? He clearly does not care about anyone but himself.

Now i would like to take you to one Halloween, our neighborhood is full of children, they come from other areas of South Portland to Trick or Treat. Now please picture little ones running from house to house joyfully collecting their loot. Now picture two guys coming out of the same problem house clearly under the influence of something more than just alcohol. My self and a couple of neighbors were watching closely because of the number of children on the street. Both men walk around their car opening and shutting random door, doing the same with the trunk for a good ten minutes. Then the driver got behind the wheel and turned the car on. Now he is in the driver's seat, engine on and he overdosed right there. Luckily, he overdosed prior to putting the car in drive. Of course, we called 911, and they came and gave him Narcan, he awoke, refused to go with the paramedics and went back into the house. This man also had warrants for failure to appear, and failure to comply with conditions of release. Another individual still free, making unbelievably bad choices that could and will eventually cost some innocent person, possibly a child, their lives!

I could continue, the stories do not end there. Our lives had become one of those police shows. Everyday people go in and out. stealing anything and everything that was not nailed down. The neighborhood had their cars broken into; items stolen out of their back yards. Not to mention every day they would fight and scream. They came in and out of the neighborhood driving on sidewalks sometimes even on people's lawns, with no regard to anyone's safety. There were individuals out on the front lawn clearly under the influence. You could walk your dog and find needles and fentanyl packages in the road. Most of the neighborhood would avoid our intersection if they could. We could not, we involuntarily had a front row seat to view some horrible and scary things.

We organized a neighborhood meeting that took place at the South Portland Police department. They tried to help direct us on what to do when we saw suspicious behavior. They directed us to call any time we felt uncomfortable. At this point we were on a first name basis with some of South Portland's finest. Working with them, giving their heads up when we see certain things. They increased their patrols through the neighborhood, and they would make traffic stops or question individuals and they would try and make arrests, but the jail would not accept them or let them go within hours.

If you amend or eliminate this act you might as well hand them the drugs, or the key to the stores or homes they want to rob. You will be telling them its ok to smoke crack in front of your children and neglect them or worse abuse them. Why bother to arrest them for a DUI, just slap their hand and let them get back in the car so they can take the life of some unsuspecting victim down the road. We need harsher punishments! If you eliminate this act, then why bother with parole? Probation? They already are not following the laws, but you would now be giving them for lack of a better term "a hall

pass.' My family lived a nightmare for over two years, before we successfully drove them out of our neighborhood and the only reason it worked was because the South Portland Police kept them on. Their Perseverance gave us our neighborhood back. If you take these conditions for them, it will surely have horrible consequences. I would be there in person if I could. As I said above, I have stories that could go on for days. I just gave you the abridged version. PLEASE, DO NOT MAKE THIS CHANGE!

Thank You

Melissa Wright

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