

# Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



February 3, 2025

Senators Rotundo and Beebe Center, Representatives Gattine and Hasenfus distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committees.

My name is Jan Collins, I am Assistant Director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC) an organization committed to ethical, positive, and humane changes in Maine's prison system.

I am here today In opposition to LD 210 to ask you to do more than give a cursory look at the DOC budget, but to consider instead systemic changes that will bring clarity and vision to Maine's Department of Corrections.

To make our system both more efficient and more effective. I recommend two major changes.

1. Corrections needs an independent ombudsman. The walls of our prisons are high. We can not climb over them nor can we see through them. In fact, most of us prefer not to consider them at all. But we do so to the detriment of individuals, families, our communities and our state. Over 30,000 individuals funnel through our states jails each year and eight thousand more are under the oversight of the Department of Corrections in our prison or on probation.

A Corrections Ombuds, appointed by the Governor and independent of the Department of Corrections, would provide residents and staff with a readily accessible and confidential means to submit suggestions and complaints to an independent professional with the authority to investigate and seek resolutions.

Such an ombuds office would be in keeping with the Maine Model of Corrections which seeks to promote "the safety and wellbeing of staff and residents" by "working collaboratively to model problem-solving, community building, and healthy interactions with others."

2. We need to reduce the number of people incarcerated. In 2024, at least two corrections officers collected over \$100,000 in overtime on top of their base salaries of approximately \$70,000 dollars. One of them actually made more money than the commissioner that year. Each of these men deserved that pay and worked hard to earn it. However we should be evaluating the necessity and the safety of these conditions.

Maine has some of the harshest sentencing in the country.<sup>2</sup> Why does Maine keep elderly and infirm individuals in prison? people with dementia? Why do we keep people in prison who have taken every course and program available for rehabilitation and have devoted themselves to serving others? Why do we incarcerate people with mental health issues instead of treating them?

We would not need overtime for corrections officers if we released people for whom further incarceration has no real purpose.

The money saved would be better used elsewhere in the state budget for community sustaining and preventative services.

I urge the committee to make thoughtful and lasting changes to the DOC budget that will serve the people of Maine for decades to come.

Thank-you,

Jan M. Collins

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<sup>1</sup><https://wgme.com/news/i-team/payroll-data-these-were-the-highest-paid-state-of-maine-employees-in-2024-money-department-of-health-and-human-services-attorney-generals-office>

<sup>2</sup> Besteman and Hylton. The Case for Second Chances. Maine Law Review 2023.  
<https://digitalcommons.maine.law.maine.edu/mlr/vol76/iss1/4/>