

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



Peter M. Lehman, PhD

20 Lawrence Ave.
Thomaston, Maine 04861
(207) 542-1496
Peter@GrowInME.com

Testimony to the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Re: Corrections Budget

February 4, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Beebe-Center,
Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Committees:

My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen and a person in long-term recovery.* I am testifying on behalf of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition whose goal is to promote restorative practices in order to increase public safety and the health of our community.

The Mission of the Maine Department of Corrections is “**Making our Communities Safer by Reducing Harm through Supportive Intervention, Empowering Change, and Restoring Lives**”

Supportive intervention, empowering change and restoring lives require PROGRAMS—educational, therapeutic and recreational programs. I urge you to examine the Department’s Budget to find the funding for these vital programs.

Mostly, you won’t find it.

These vital programs to fulfill its mission and to save Maine money are mostly funded by the Resident Benefit Fund (RBF) in each facility.

RBF money primarily comes from MDOC markups on Commissary purchases and from markups on telephone calls.

In other words, RBF money mostly comes from families and loved ones of residents. These profits are a **Family TAX** on families of the incarcerated.

* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.

We believe that basketballs and educational programs and counseling and treatment programs are a State responsibility.

Encouraging support and connection with families and loved ones is such an important tool in Corrections that the Federal prison system has **free** telephone and other electronic contact. By charging fees and making profits, the MDOC sabotages its own mission, turning effective programs into profit centers.

The current practice increases taxes on residents and families and weakens the connections between residents and their outside support. This is contrary to the MDOC mission.

The answer is in YOUR laps: the Legislature must allocate **adequate funding** to the MDOC to accomplish its stated mission without imposing a special Family Tax.

Thank you for your attention.

