



Re: LD 244 - An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Indigent Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities

February 10, 2025

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Gia Drew, and I am the Executive Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. This testimony is on behalf of EqualityMaine.

We urge you to support LD 244 - An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Indigent Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities. LGBTQ+ adults are incarcerated at three times the rate of the total adult population, and LGBTQ+ people experience high rates of homelessness, poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and violence – factors that drive their overrepresentation in the carceral system.¹ In fact, more than one in five LGBTQ+ adults (22%) are living in poverty. When looking across race/ethnicity, poverty rates among LGBTQ+ people of color in the U.S. far exceed those of other groups. For example, almost half of Latine transgender adults (48%), as well as approximately four in ten Black transgender adults (39%), are living in poverty.²

Each year approximately 700,000 individuals return home from state prisons around the country and an additional 9 million are released from county jails. More than 10% of those coming in and out of prisons and jails are unhoused in the months preceding and following their incarceration.³ Being unhoused or unstably housed increases an individual's risk of becoming incarcerated again. In the words of Hailey Ockinga, the executive director of Beyond These Walls, which serves LGBTQ+ people impacted by

¹ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/10/Incarcerated-LGBTQ-Youth-and-Adults.pdf>.

² "LGBT Poverty in the United States." *Williams Institute*.

<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-poverty-us/>.

³ "Homelessness and Prisoner Re-Entry." 2024. *Volunteers of America*. July 11.

<https://www.voa.org/homelessness-and-prisoner-re-entry/>.

incarceration in the Pacific Northwest, "Housing is one of the biggest barriers we have to overcome. It's a basic need. Before a person can succeed, they have to survive."⁴

Transitional housing plays a crucial role, especially within marginalized communities such as the LGBTQ+ population. LD 244 provides a real opportunity to ensure successful reentry for returning individuals and reduce recidivism in Maine. We urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 244.

Thank you,

Gia Drew (she/her)
Executive Director, EqualityMaine

⁴ Diaz, Jaclyn. 2022. "Trans People Struggle to Find Housing after Prison. This Group Is Trying to Help." NPR. NPR. November 28.
<https://www.npr.org/2022/11/28/1132874871/beyond-these-walls-transgender-lgbtq-prison-transitional-housing>.