

# Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



February 9, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

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 in opposition to **LD 626 An Act to Explicitly Allow the Department of Corrections to Charge Room and Board to Residents Who Perform Remote Work in Detention and Correctional Facilities and to Amend the Laws Governing Rehabilitative Programs.**

Debtors' prisons were abolished by Congress in 1833. However, in the 1970s and 1980s we started to imprison more people for **lesser** crimes.<sup>1</sup>

As more and more people were sent to prisons, both courts and prisons looked for ways to recoup the cost of their expanding systems.

As a result, "offenders themselves are often forced to foot the bill for parole, reentry, drug rehab, electronic monitoring, and other services"<sup>2</sup>, as well as court fees and fines.

The Maine Department of Corrections has a Collection Priority List<sup>3</sup> of twenty two items accompanied by the percentage of any income that can be attached for each of the debts. Under this system, the DOC serves the judicial system as the collector of court judgements, attorney fees, alimony, court fines, court fees, court penalties, and court surcharges. It serves the Department of Human Services as the collector of ongoing and back child support. It adds its own charges for medical fees, facility charges, facility restitution and sanctions, as well as, replacement ID cards. On top of that, the DOC requires that individuals contribute 10% of their income up to a

\$1000 while it reserves the interest on those accounts to use at its own discretion.<sup>4</sup>

Even though a handful of residents may have the good fortune of acquiring a remote job, they often have a family on the outside who have, up to this point, been shouldering these debts while struggling to meet their own needs.<sup>5</sup>

We oppose the concept of incarcerated residents paying for their prison cell. We believe adding one more category to the twenty two already in place is a barrier to reentry success, which is or should be the primary focus of the Department of Corrections.

Many of the people who are or will be employed remotely have already been steadfastly committed to their own rehabilitation. They are fully capable of success in the community. It would benefit their families, their communities and the state of Maine if we acknowledged their “job well done” and release them.

It makes no sense to continue to keep people in prison at a cost to state taxpayers of \$78,000 or more per person per year when they could be on the outside paying taxes and supporting their families.

We urge you to amend this proposal to delete any charges and to consider the reinstatement of a pathway to release for those who have so ably demonstrated their readiness for re-entry.

Thank-you for your consideration,  
Jan

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<sup>1</sup>Eli Hager. **Debtors Prison, Then and Now:FAQ**.The Marshall Project. News. 02.24.2015.<https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdal/page/file/918356/dl> p. 4

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.5.

<sup>3</sup>Maine DOC Collection Priority List <https://www.maine.gov/corrections/sites/maine.gov/corrections/files/inline-files/Collection%20Priority%20List.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Maine DOC Policy Number:2.12 Prisoner and Resident Accounts <https://www.maine.gov/corrections/sites/maine.gov/corrections/files/inline-files/34865653.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Saneta deVuono-powell, Chris Schweidler, Alicia Walters, Azadeh Zohrabi. Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families. Sept.2015. <https://ellabakercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Who-Pays-FINAL.pdf>