

March 17, 2025



www.maineprisoneradvocacy.org/

Greetings Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and Honorable members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

My name is Jan Collins. I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, an organization committed to ethical, positive, and humane changes in Maine's prison system. I am here to support in principle, **LD 884 Resolve, to Establish the Criminal Justice Legal Aid Clinic Pilot Project at the University of Maine School of Law.**

The sixth amendment of the US constitution guarantees fundamental rights to people accused of crimes, including the right to a speedy and public trial, a jury trial, legal representation, and the right to confront witnesses.

The state of Maine has failed to fulfill these guarantees and is currently in a protracted court battle to force the issue. Justice Mikaela Murphy has written that the public interests in this case are “significant” and include *“the interest in a fair, functional, and stable criminal justice system; the public interest in the protection of the liberty interests for all the citizens of Maine who are charged with crimes punishable by incarceration; and the public interest in ensuring that the presumption of innocence is meaningfully protected against the power of the state through the effective assistance of counsel.”*¹

It is with this background that we support this legislation in hopes that law students will have the opportunity for significant mentoring in criminal law to allow them to feel confident in their abilities to present a valid and eloquent defense in criminal cases.

We understand that the University of Maine School of Law currently provides free legal aid services through its six programs, which include the **General Practice Clinic**, the **Refugee and Human Rights Clinic**, the **Rural Practice Clinic**, the **Prisoner Assistance Clinic**, the **Protection from Abuse Program**, and the **Youth Justice Clinic**.

What is unclear to us is how the resources provided for in this bill will be divided. Is the intention of the bill to create a new clinic? If so, what are the parameters of the cases handled by the new clinic, who will it serve, and what are the criteria used to measure its success?

We look forward to a more robust indigent criminal defense system in Maine.

Thank-you.

Sincerely,
Jan M. Collins
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¹ Emily Allen, Portland Press Herald. ***Maine to drop charges, release people from jail over public defense failures***. March 7, 2025. <https://www.pressherald.com/2025/03/07/maine-to-drop-charges-release-people-from-jail-in-april-over-public-defense-failures/>