Maine County Commissioners Association

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March 24, 2025

Sen. Beebe-Center, Chair
Rep. Hasenfus, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: ***Testimony of MCCA regarding LD 931, An Act to Amend the Law Allowing Incarcerated Pretrial or Presentence Individuals to Be Credited Time for Participation in Voluntary Work Projects in a Jail***

Chair Beebe-Center, Chair Hasenfus, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

On behalf of the Maine County Commissioners Association, we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to this Committee in ***support*** of LD 931. This legislation is common sense and puts those in pre-trial detention on the same footing as those already sentenced regarding the opportunity for sentence reduction.

About MCCA. Briefly, the Maine County Commissioners Association was established in 1890 to assist Maine's county government in providing vital services to Maine citizens in a responsive, efficient, and credible manner. The Association is based in Augusta, represents all 16 of Maine's counties, and is governed by a board with representation from each participating county.

What does LD 931 do? Under current law, individuals who have been sentenced are permitted to participate in public works related projects or in the improvement of property owned by charitable organizations, with the possibility of earning sentence reductions. However, those detained pre-trial or pre-sentence do not have access to these opportunities. LD 931 seeks to rectify this disparity by allowing pre-trial or pre-sentence residents to voluntarily engage in such projects, earning up to one day removed from their sentence for every 16 hours of participation, provided they are subsequently sentenced on the charge for which they are detained. This approach ensures equitable treatment and recognizes the value of constructive activities during detention.
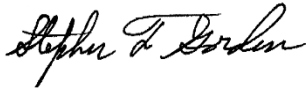
Discussion. With current judicial backlogs, individuals can be detained pre-trial for extended periods of time (months), which in turn may lead to negative impacts on their employment, housing, and family stability. Allowing these individuals to participate in public service work not only mitigates the adverse effects of prolonged detention but also facilitates their reintegration into society. Engagement in such programs can reduce idleness, promote skill development, and enhance self-worth among jail residents.

A critical safeguard within LD 931 is the requirement for the sheriff's approval before a pre-trial resident can participate in a work program. This provision ensures that only those individuals deemed suitable and posing no risk to public safety are allowed to engage in these activities. The sheriff's oversight maintains the integrity of the program while offering residents the opportunity to contribute positively to the community.
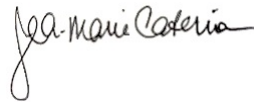
There is also a financial benefit to the public associated with a program of this nature. Since nearly 90% of all county jail residents are pre-trial, a program that offers the opportunity to reduce jail time means less burden on jails and less burden on county finances. This benefit flows through to local property taxpayers who currently fund nearly 80% of the cost of operating county jails.

Conclusion. We believe that LD 931 represents sound policy by providing pretrial and presentence residents with the opportunity to engage in meaningful work, thereby promoting fairness, reducing recidivism, and benefiting our communities. If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Gorden
Co-Chair, Legislative Policy Committee, MCCA
MCCA

Jean-Marie Caterina
Co-Chair, Legislative Policy Committee,

cc: Commissioner Andre Cushing, President, MCCA
      James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP, Legislative counsel for MCCA