

Linda Small
Reentry Sisters
LD 822

Testimony in Support of LD 822 An Act to End the Collection of Certain Probation Fees

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Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and the distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Linda Small from Portland, and I am the Executive Director of Reentry Sisters. Today, I am here to express our strong support for LD 822.

At Reentry Sisters, we work directly with formerly incarcerated women, many of whom are mothers, caregivers, and survivors of trauma. We see firsthand how probation fees create unnecessary financial barriers to successful reentry.

One of our members, Sarah, is a single mother of two young children. She is committed to rebuilding her life after incarceration, but she faces overwhelming challenges. She can only work part-time because childcare is too expensive. Every month, she has to make impossible choices—does she buy groceries for her kids or pay her probation fees? No one on probation should have to choose between feeding their family and fulfilling a court-ordered obligation. These fees don't promote accountability—they set people up for failure.

According to the Fees & Fines Justice Center's 2022 report, Maine ranks 40th out of 50 states in fairness and criminalizing poverty and scored only 20 out of 100 points on the Fines and Fees Justice Index. For instance, Benchmark 1 recognizes that fees serve no role in making communities safer. Maine Score: 0. Benchmark 3: Barring Conflicts of Interest Around Fines and Fees Revenue by paying into law enforcement and court system budgets. Maine Score: 0 (National Center Access to Justice, 2022).

Adding financial penalties on top of those who are struggling only increases the likelihood of recidivism. That is not justice. Instead, fees perpetuate a cycle of poverty and punishment that disproportionately impacts low-income people, women, and communities of color. Nationwide, two-thirds (66%) of people on probation make less than \$20,000 annually, and Maine ranks 29th in median household income (Prison Policy Initiative, 2019). Maine families are already struggling to survive.

Maine's probation system should be focused on support, accountability, and reintegration—not revenue generation. By eliminating supervision and temporary leave fees, this bill removes significant barriers that other states have implemented (California, Oregon, and Alaska), recognizing that financial penalties do not make communities safer—stronger support systems do (Fines and Fees Justice Center, 2022).

This bill is a step toward a more just and effective probation system, and I urge you to support it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

References

Fines and Fees Justice Center (2022). 50 State Survey: Probation Parole Fees. <https://finesandfeesjusticecenter.org/content/uploads/2022/05/Probation-and-Parole-Fees-Survey-Final-2022-.pdf>

National Center for Access to Justice (2022). Fines and Fees Index Maine. <https://ncaj.org/state-rankings/justice-index>

Prison Policy Initiative (2019). New date: Low income – but high fees – for people on probation. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/04/09/probation_income/