

Testimony of Linda Small
Executive Director, Reentry Sisters
In Support of LD 405 – An Act to Define Solitary Confinement
Before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
April 24, 2025

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee.

My name is Linda Small, and I serve as Executive Director of Reentry Sisters, an organization dedicated to supporting justice-impacted women as they return to their communities and rebuild their lives. I'm here today in strong support of LD 405, which would define solitary confinement in Maine's laws consistent with the international standards set by the Nelson Mandela Rules.

This is more than a policy issue; it's a human rights issue. Maine has allowed the use of what is effectively solitary confinement without even naming it as such. People, including women, mothers, and daughters, have been confined to their cells for 22 or more hours per day, sometimes for extended periods. Corrections policies define these "restrictive or administrative housing" conditions. The silence about this issue in our statutes has allowed suffering to hide in plain sight.

Women in Reentry Sisters have experienced the devastating effects of prolonged isolation. They've been locked in cells for 22 hours a day, denied meaningful social contact, fresh air, and basic human dignity. These conditions leave scars—deep emotional and psychological wounds that follow people far beyond the prison walls. Solitary confinement is not rehabilitative. It's trauma-inducing. And it runs counter to everything we know about what supports safety and transformation. Without a legal definition, we leave the door open for this harm to continue unmonitored, unchecked, and unnamed.

LD 405 does not eliminate necessary disciplinary tools. It simply provides clarity, accountability, and a human rights-based standard. Defining solitary confinement is a critical first step toward ending its overuse. It helps ensure transparency and provides a foundation for evaluating and reducing harmful practices within our correctional system.

We urge you to support this bill, not just as a piece of legislation but as a commitment to humane treatment, dignity, and the belief that everyone—even those incarcerated—deserves basic protections. I hope Maine acknowledges, through enacting LD 405, that locking someone in a cell for 22 hours a day does not mirror the Maine Model of Corrections' rehabilitative mission.

Thank you.