



## Restorative Justice Project Maine

Distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee,

My Name is Norman Hightower and I'm writing this testimony in support of LD 1706, an act regarding notification of appointment of legal representatives for indigent clients in custody, on behalf of Restorative Justice Project Maine.

We believe it is imperative that individuals have access to competent representation as soon as possible when they are determined to be indigent. Many times people who cannot afford to pay an attorney are treated far differently than those who have a privately funded attorney. They are held longer in pre-trial detention because they have no one to file motions for bail hearings or other pretrial motions that could help secure their freedom through bail or possibly a dismissal. Incarcerated individuals who can't afford to hire an attorney don't have anyone working diligently to make sure their case is being heard. Thus they miss out on opportunities that could be the difference between sitting in jail waiting for their day in court or walking into court as an unshackled free person, and while everyone is presumed innocent until proven guilty, there is a distinct advantage in walking into the courtroom in your own clothes versus walking in wearing an orange jumpsuit and cuffs.

I myself have sat in county jail unable to post bail and without representation for over a month. In that time I lost all of my personal belongings, including a vehicle and housing. I lost my job also during that time. I finally ended up getting a bail reduction hearing and was able to post bail. If I had had an attorney assigned to my case sooner, that bail reduction hearing may have happened a lot sooner and I may not have had to experience such a catastrophic setback.

Having a lawyer who is invested in the interest of their client assigned early on can make a big difference in making sure everyone has the ability to properly navigate the difficult and often confusing landscape of the criminal justice system, regardless of their ability to pay. This bill is an attempt to ensure that indigent individuals are treated fairly by getting adequate counsel assigned to them in a timely manner. Restorative Justice Project Maine and I support LD 1706 and we ask that in the interest of justice, you do the same. Thank you for your time and careful consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Norman Hightower

Restorative Services Support Specialist

Restorative Justice Project Maine

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**Restorative Justice Project Maine**

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