



**Testimony of Linda Small**  
**Executive Director, Reentry Sisters**  
**In Opposition to LD 1725 (Proposed Amendment) – Regarding County Jail Boards of Visitors**  
**Before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee**  
**April 28, 2025**

Good morning, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and the distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Linda Small, and I live in Portland. I'm the Executive Director of Reentry Sisters, an organization that supports women and caregivers impacted by incarceration as they transition back into our communities. I'm here today to express strong opposition to the proposed changes to LD 1725, which would strip away vital language ensuring representation on county jail Boards of Visitors by people with relevant lived and professional experience.

Boards of Visitors are citizen oversight bodies, and their legitimacy depends on representation that reflects the reality of incarceration in Maine today. These boards exist to monitor jail conditions, offer recommendations, and ensure humane treatment of those in custody, especially individuals with mental health needs, and particularly women, who are the fastest-growing incarcerated population in our state.

The original bill rightly required that at least one board member know issues related to the incarceration of women, one be a woman with lived experience of incarceration and child welfare involvement, and one have professional expertise in mental or behavioral health. These are not arbitrary qualifications. These are essential perspectives, especially in a time when the intersections of trauma, mental health, and incarceration are well-documented and disproportionately affect women and caregivers.

Removing these requirements undermines the integrity and usefulness of the Boards of Visitors. It signals a move away from transparency, accountability, and inclusive oversight, and risks turning these boards into echo chambers for the systems they are meant to observe. Without these voices, critical issues—like the impact of solitary confinement on women, or the treatment of incarcerated mothers with open child welfare cases—are far less likely to be raised, addressed, or even acknowledged.

At Reentry Sisters, we know firsthand the importance of having justice-impacted people at the table. We see daily how women with lived experience bring unmatched insight into what works, what causes harm, and what change is truly possible. Including their voices is not just best practice—it's a matter of justice and credibility.

We urge this committee to preserve the original intent of LD 1725 by maintaining the requirements for representation from individuals with lived experience, gender-specific knowledge, and mental health expertise. These voices are not expendable, they are essential.

Thank you for your time and commitment to inclusive oversight and equitable justice.