



Testimony of Linda Small

Executive Director, Reentry Sisters

In Support of Opposition to LD 1749 Resolve, Directing the Department of Corrections to Study Achieving Gender Equality

Before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

April 28, 2025

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Linda Small, and I am the Executive Director of Reentry Sisters, an organization supporting justice-impacted women in Maine. I am here today to express our strong support for LD 1749, a critical step toward addressing the entrenched gender inequalities that persist in Maine’s correctional system.

Women survive in a prison system designed primarily by and for men. Across the country—and in Maine—women face unequal access to programming, health care, trauma-informed services, vocational training, and reentry supports. For example, college programming began for men in Maine prisons in 2006, but women didn’t have access to college in prison until a full decade later, in 2016. That ten-year delay illustrates the systemic inequalities women face inside the carceral system.

According to the 2023 Department of Corrections report, although the number of incarcerated men decreased and the number of incarcerated women increased, there was an increase in men’s participation in substance use disorder treatment while women’s participation decreased. The same is true in cognitive behavioral therapy, as men’s participation increased, and women’s participation was cut by more than 50%. Women must wait, sometimes weeks, until staff are available to be transported to dental and eye care. However, the men may walk to these places as they are located within the men’s living area.

The women we serve at Reentry Sisters have experienced these disparities firsthand: lack of mental health services appropriate for women, limited education opportunities, inequitable access to items on the prison commissary, and placement in facilities far from their children and communities. These conditions are harmful, and they make reentry harder.

LD 1749 is a thoughtful, necessary bill. It asks the Department of Corrections to take stock of current practices and policies, assess where inequality exists, and recommend solutions. This is not about placing blame—it is about creating a path forward where every incarcerated person, regardless of gender, is treated with dignity and offered meaningful opportunities for rehabilitation.

We urge you to support LD 1749 and make Maine a leader in addressing gender disparities in our criminal legal system. Thank you for your time and commitment to justice that recognizes the full humanity and potential of all people, including women and girls impacted by incarceration.

Sincerely, Linda Small
Executive Director, Reentry Sisters

References:

Maine Department of Corrections, 2023, Adult Data Report.

<https://www.maine.gov/corrections/sites/maine.gov.corrections/files/inline-files/2023%20Year%20End%20Adult%20Data%20Report.pdf>