

**Testimony in opposition of LD 1725**  
**the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety**  
April 28, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford and a member of the York County Jail Board of Visitors.

I am writing in opposition of LD 1725, An Act Regarding the Membership of and Requirements for County Jail Boards of Visitors.

I volunteered as an educator at the York County Jail for 15 years, for a few years at the Maine State Prison Women's Center and Women's Reentry Center, and was an educator at a women's prison in the south west for 4 years. I feel my experience and perspective, specifically relating to the unique needs of incarcerated women, is helpful to the Board of Visitors.

I am disheartened to see that the major sections struck from the original legislation are specific to women's needs. A July 2024 report from the Council on Criminal Justice titled: [Women's Justice - A Preliminary Assessment of Women in the Criminal Justice System](#) states "While there are significantly more men than women incarcerated in the U.S., **women in the criminal justice system face distinct challenges** and have a unique set of needs that frequently go unaddressed. Estimates suggest that at least three out of four women in jails are mothers. Prior to their incarceration, mothers were more than twice as likely as fathers to be the **sole or primary caretaker of their children**. Women have **specific health-related needs** that prisons and jails struggle to address, ranging from the provision of menstruation supplies to pregnancy and menopausal care and the treatment of women's higher reported rates of mental health and substance use disorders."

The report concluded "Women who make contact with the criminal justice system are more likely than their male counterparts to have experienced trauma and abuse, have mental health and substance use disorders, be living in poverty, have custody of minor children, and have engaged in crime in the context of their relationships with intimate male partners. Women's roles as caretakers add special complexity to how they navigate the system, and many of the negative effects of system involvement reverberate for their children, families, and communities. While in prison or jail, women's specific healthcare needs—especially needs related to reproductive health—are often neglected, leading to a range of negative physical and mental health outcomes." The report also notes that income disparities make it harder for women to pay bail and other fees.

This bill would remove any need for experience with women's issues, children's welfare or experience in the field of mental or behavioral health on the Board of Visitors.

A 'Board of Visitors' should be a group of interested and experienced community members who are focused on the well being of the incarcerated population, the staff and the community. The York County Jail BOV is a group of community volunteers with vast experience working with diverse populations, system impacted or not, in education and health care. Our report described the outstanding staff at and administration of the York County Jail. "YCJ is well run with a professional, engaged, and empathetic staff. Several residents spoke well of the jail and staff experiences, reflecting their respect and appreciation for the level of care and professionalism. Their programming includes the largest MAT program of any jail in the state as well as many types of educational, personal growth and volunteer programs." We also noted "The staff resources are exhausted administering these programs as well as focusing on the overall safety and well-being of all residents."

The staff is exceptional, overworked and often need to act as medical and mental health providers when they are not trained to be. They need more assistance placing those in crisis in proper care facilities, they need more funding for the MAT program and they need more resources to maintain the needed safe environment for all at the jail and the community.

Under LD1725 this is not information that would be shared with the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. There should be a central group to review this information for all counties and assess what is working, what might not be, and potentially how resources can be shared or redirected for the well being of all Mainers. The Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee's interest and involvement in the county jail system through these reports can only benefit us all.

I hope you will oppose LD 1725.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson

Sanford, Maine.

<https://counciloncj.org/womens-justice-a-preliminary-assessment-of-women-in-the-criminal-justice-system>