

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



April 28, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Jan Collins, I am Assistant Director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC) an organization committed to ethical, positive, and humane changes in Maine's prison system. I am here in opposition to [LD 1725](#) An Act Regarding the Membership of and Requirements for County Jail Boards of Visitors.

LD 1725 would be a step backward for several reasons. These provisions were put in place last session in a bill sponsored by Senator Beebe Center with input from the Sheriffs Association. They were intended to increase parity between jail and prison boards of visitors and allow for this committee to fulfill its oversight role.

Women's incarceration has [grown at twice the pace](#)¹ of men's incarceration in recent decades, and has disproportionately been located in local jails.²

Nationwide, women's state prison populations grew 834% over nearly 40 years... primarily driven by the opioid crisis. ³

Research consistently shows that incarcerated women face different problems than men — and prisons often make those problems worse. While not a comprehensive list, some of the major issues facing incarcerated women include:

- Women are more likely to enter prison with a history of abuse, trauma, and mental health problems. But even in the “secure” prison environment, women face sexual abuse by correctional staff or other incarcerated women, and are **more likely** than men to experience serious psychological distress.
- Women have different physical health needs, including reproductive healthcare, management of menopause, nutrition, and very often treatment for substance use disorders. Again, the health systems in prisons — designed for men — frequently fail to meet these basic needs.

- Most women in prison (62%) are mothers of minor children. These women are more likely than fathers in prison to be the primary caretakers of their children, so the increasing number of women in prisons means more and more family disruption and insecurity. Incarcerated women and their families suffer from lack of face-to-face contact: because there are fewer women's prisons, women are more likely to be held in prisons located far from home, making visits **difficult** and expensive. To make matters worse, if children are placed in foster care when their mother is incarcerated, her prison sentence can sever family ties **permanently**.⁴

It is essential to have the voice of women who have experienced the carceral system and have had to interact with child protective present on the Board of Visitors. I agree with the sheriffs that it is not easy to find someone who fits this category, but that doesn't mean it is not possible or that we should drop the requirement. Franklin County Board of Visitors has a great member of our board who fills this role. She is a licensed counselor. Her experiences are invaluable.

I also believe that the CJPS should not abdicate its role in overseeing the millions of dollars the state allocates to county jails. The Jail Boards of Visitors provide an incredibly important role in supporting jail corrections officers, staff, and residents and advocating for positive changes in the county detention centers.

I urge you to continue to support Boards of Visitors by voting no on this bill. I would be grateful for a unanimous ought not to pass vote on this bill.

Thank-you,
Jan

1 Sawyer, Wendy. *The Gender Divide: Tracking Women's State Prison Growth*.
https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime.html

2 Kajstrura, Aleks and Sawyer, Wendy. *Women's Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2024*.

3 Sawyer. op.cit.

4 Sawyer. op cit.