

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



May 5, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the health and human services committee,

My name is Jan Collins, I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC) 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 to support LD 1843 An Act to Provide Peer Respite for Individuals with Mental Health Care Needs

This bills seek to serve people in their local area with community resources. Evidence consistently shows that strong community resources prevent the progression of disease, diminishes the number of emergency room visits, and forestalls the need for residential services. More importantly community services allow for individuals to stay in their homes surrounded by their natural support systems.

Although I have close family members who have been diagnosed with and suffer from mental illness. I am in no way an expert in the finer points of each of these pieces of legislation. The people behind me are the experts. They will tell you the benefits of this legislation.

I can tell you what the alternatives are.

Estimates of the percentage of jail and prison inmates who have severe mental illness vary. Legislative testimony from County Commissioners in Cumberland state that 83% of their county jail residents are on psychotropic medications. National studies estimate approximately 1 in 5 individuals in jails and prisons have severe mental health diagnoses (schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, major

depression or brief psychotic disorder) with higher numbers in jails than in prisons.¹

There are now ten times more individuals with Serious Mental Illnesses (SMI) in prisons and jails than there are in state mental hospitals.²

It costs over \$100,000/year to house someone at Maine State Prison. The mental health services available are minimal, the conditions are less than therapeutic, and for many, trauma inducing. If one person who receives community mental health services avoids going to prison for a ten year term it will save the state a million dollars, enough to pay for 2 respite care centers for one year.

We can invest in prevention, or we can invest in punishment. With national jail and prison recidivism rates estimated between 60 and 70% over a 5 year period following release, prevention is a much better investment for our tax dollars.

Please support the bills before you today.

Sincerely,

Jan M. Collins

Assistant Director

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¹Serious Mental Illness Prevalence in Jails and Prisons. Sept 2016

<https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/evidence-and-research/learn-more-about/369>

² Torrey EF, Kennard AD, Eslinger D, et al. More mentally ill persons are in jails and prisons than hospitals: A survey of the states. Treatment Advocacy Center Arlington, VA; 2010

³Reducing Recidivism: Creating a Path to Successful Re-entry

[https://www.firststepalliance.org/post/reducing-recidivism?](https://www.firststepalliance.org/post/reducing-recidivism?gclid=Cj0KCQjwuLShBhC_ARIsAFod4fI0c042u0BLKeBFSY7xOkoc5AUUPL-lkiyNsU45WvYQTiDIfydjgJcaArRIEALw_wcBhttps://www.firststepalliance.org/post/reducing-recidivism?gclid=Cj0KCQjwuLShBhC_ARIsAFod4fI0c042u0BLKeBFSY7xOkoc5AUUPL-lkiyNsU45WvYQTiDIfydjgJcaArRIEALw_wcB)

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