



## Restorative Justice Project Maine

Distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Norman Hightower. I am a Restorative Services Support Specialist with Restorative Justice Project Maine and recently reentered individual. I am writing this testimony in regard to LD 1844 (an act to expand the state's workforce by supporting the transition from incarceration to employment) on behalf of myself & RJP Maine.

We firmly believe in supporting the transition from incarceration to employment. RJP Maine works closely with residents at the Maine Coastal Regional Reentry Center in Belfast, ME (a facility that houses state inmates) to help them to adjust to all areas of reentry. It is a mission that is near & dear to the organization. I know this on a personal level because they offered me employment & assisted me tremendously in transitioning from incarceration to that employment. I also know personally what it is like to transition with varying degrees of support. I have been to the Bolduc Correctional facility and participated in its work release program. I was able to transition that employment opportunity to life outside of D.O.C. custody. I have also experienced getting released from the Maine State Prison with \$50 "gate money" and a bus ticket. So I can tell you firsthand that having the privilege of being able to gain employment while incarcerated is extremely helpful for residents trying to form healthy habits that will keep them from reoffending. The issue is that not everyone makes it to work release. This may be due to their own behavior or any number of reasons. Some individuals end up being released from more restrictive settings. Settings where they haven't been able to cook for themselves or do their own laundry, they haven't done anything to prepare themselves for going out into the world and performing all of the day to day activities that most of us are able to do basically on autopilot. They have not learned and developed the conflict resolution skills necessary to navigate life and succeed in society. These are the people who are most likely to reoffend, these are the people most in need of support services that would help them transition to employment. The language the D.O.C. has agreed to for this bill would make this support unavailable to residents who are housed in Close custody and Restrictive housing. Basically those who need this type of support most would be missing out on the benefits of this type of programming. LD 1844 would be most effective if made available to the entire D.O.C. population. For that reason Restorative Justice Project Maine is neither in support of nor opposed to the passage of this bill. We feel that an amendment that makes this programming available to all D.O.C. residents would be appropriate.

I greatly appreciate the fact that we, as a state, are concerned with finding ways to help Maine's incarcerated individuals transition to the workforce. LD 1844 would better serve all Maine residents if it includes support services for all of its incarcerated residents. Thank you for your careful consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Norman Hightower

Restorative Services Support Specialist

Restorative Justice Project Maine

**Restorative Justice Project Maine**

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