
**Testimony of Andrea Mancuso, on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence
Neither for Nor Against LD 1844: “An Act to Expand the State’s Workforce by Supporting the
Transition from Incarceration to Employment”**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
Monday, May 5, 2025**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am writing on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV)¹ to share our perspective on issues related to re-entry from incarceration in Maine as you consider this proposal.

Despite the broad spectrum of the opinion of crime victims regarding the value and impact of incarceration, we know that the overwhelming majority of those who commit crimes in Maine each year are people who will, at some point, again live in our communities. There must be appropriate support and resources to attend to that reality. In the context of domestic abuse and violence, which is already a patterned crime, any resident of a Maine Department of Corrections facility is very unlikely to be a “first-time” offender. Release without sufficient support and supervision upon re-entry is highly likely to have negative impact on victim safety. Unlike victims of many other crimes, for domestic abuse and violence there is most often more that binds the victim and the offender than just the crime for which the offender was incarcerated, including friends and family in common, children, and financial interests. MCEDV supports increased attention to and investment in thoughtful re-entry for residents of correctional facilities in Maine.

Our network appreciates the goal of this bill. And we note that Maine’s Domestic Abuse Homicide Review Panel has observed that some of the more dangerous, repeat offenders – to specifically include those who are re-incarcerated following a probation violation – are being sentenced by our courts to serve a straight time sentence without any period of probation/supervision upon their release. In these cases in particular, thoughtful re-entry planning is essential. A person has already been unsuccessful under community supervision. However, it is

¹ MCEDV represents a membership of the eight regional domestic violence resource centers across Maine as well as two culturally specific service providers. Last year, our programs provided services to more than 12,000 survivors of domestic abuse and violence and their children in our state.

unclear that the amended language, as proposed, would result in adding any additional re-entry support services to these higher risk cases. Straight release of these higher risk cases into the community, without a period of adjustment and support, is not sufficiently supporting the safety of our communities. MCEDV encourages policymakers to address the need for thoughtful re-entry planning for the full range of resident risk types.

This bill as drafted would encourage enhanced re-entry planning across a wide range of areas, including housing needs, employment opportunities, connections to pro-social activities, peer support and substance use recovery and connections to any necessary and appropriate community resources. These are all critical components to help any person be successful upon their release from a correctional facility. However, there are several other important risk-related issues that require attention and planning – issues that we have observed to have resulted in several cases of post-release violence and death – that we would urge you to explicitly name as requirements in both the pre-release planning and the post-release follow-up in order to support reintegration. These include:

- identifying possible access to firearms by a participant who will leave the facility as a prohibited person and helping the participant's primary community supports understand those prohibitions;
- identifying and reviewing any protection from abuse or other victim-related court orders in place and ensuring the participant's release plan supports compliance with those; and
- connecting the resident to any violence intervention program that might be appropriate to support behavior change.

Without these things properly accounted for, particularly for those incarcerated for crimes involving domestic violence, the release plan fails to pay actual attention to some of the most significant risks that person poses.

With the volume of cases we have observed in the last several years of residents released from probation or a Department of Corrections facility and subsequently engaging in new criminal conduct with a firearm the person was legally prohibited from having, we also encourage you to consider requiring a similar process for the Department of Corrections to review these individual cases as Maine's law enforcement community must now engage in when a serious injury or domestic violence homicide happens in their community and is committed by a person that was known to their agency. This type of multi-disciplinary review of how laws and policies were implemented in an individual case can help support law and policy modifications that may prevent future tragedies. To the extent the Committee is interested, proposed amended language is offered below.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our perspective on these issues.

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Proposed Amendments:

1. Explicitly require re-entry planning to address the following additional issues:
 - A. identifying possible access to firearms by a participant who will leave the facility as a prohibited person and helping the participant's primary community supports understand those prohibitions;
 - B. identifying and reviewing any protection from abuse or other victim-related court orders in place and ensuring the participant's release plan supports compliance with those; and
 - C. connecting the resident to any violence intervention program that might be appropriate to support behavior change.
2. Require the Department of Corrections to engage in a similar multi-disciplinary agency review of cases where a person prohibited from possessing firearms due to domestic violence is released from DOC supervision or incarceration and goes on to commit subsequent crime with a firearm.

"The Department of Corrections shall conduct an agency review of any case where a person who was previously released from a Department of Corrections facility after serving any portion of a sentence subsequently commits a new crime with a firearm when:

- a. The person was in the custody of the Department as a result of a crime committed against a family or household member or dating partner; and
- b. The person was prohibited from possession of a firearm under state or federal law as a result of the conviction for which the person was in the custody of the Department.

The Department shall conduct the review in consultation with a representative from the statewide coalition of domestic violence resource centers and may involve other community partners as appropriate. The purpose of the review shall be to assess applicable provisions of law and policies pertaining to re-entry support and community supervision practices and how those laws and policies were implemented in the case at hand, identify any gaps or challenges, and make any recommendations as to modifications to those laws and policies that result from such review. The recommendations from any review conducted pursuant to this section shall be aggregated and reported to the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety no later than February 1st of the following calendar year."