

Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH

In Support of LD 1979

Resolve, Directing the Department of Corrections to Convene a Working Group to Examine the Establishment of a Program to Award Earned Time Credit for Educational Achievement to Persons Who Are Incarcerated

Presented by Representative Sargent

Before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, May 19, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Lani Graham. I am from Freeport and am in support of LD 1979, which, if implemented, would help Maine join most other states in offering both good time and earned credit time to those who are incarcerated and thus better prepare incarcerated people to enter the workforce when released.

While the Maine Department of Corrections (DOC) does offer “good time”, it is important to understand that this excellent program doesn’t offer the same advantages as earned time credit for educational achievement. Of course, it is important that people who are incarcerated have a good attitude, follow rules and participate in programs. But this does not mean that without incentives incarcerated people will see the benefit of taking courses leading to advanced degrees.

It is clear cut that even with the best of preparation, it is difficult for those with criminal records to find work. While the general national unemployment rate may be less than 5%, the unemployment rate of the formally incarcerated hovers around 30%.¹ Therefore the Maine must do as much as possible to enhance opportunities for those being released.

Having earned time credit could prepare those who have been incarcerated for jobs in the community that are much needed, such as data entry, software development or physical therapy. Education provides skills and knowledge that are essential for securing stable employment and earning a living. But also taking courses that lead to advanced degrees force people to learn to develop habits and behaviors that lead to good citizenship. Conversely, those with less education may struggle to find decent jobs, leading to unemployment or underemployment, which in turn can increase the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities to make ends meet. Offering earned time credit is a clear incentive to go beyond the easiest steps of rehabilitation

Many states that offer both good time and earned time have templates to offer, that can serve as guides for any group working on this idea. I do think it would be useful to consider including both people with lived experience in the group as well as those who have significant experience with education in Maine.

¹ <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/data-deep-dive-the-workforce-impact-of-second-chance-hiring-3>

Thank you for your attention. Please support this simple, but important step in improving the chances of the incarcerated people to achieve success on release and be good citizens in their communities.