

Testimony in Support of LD 1962 – An Act to Establish an Independent Corrections Ombudsman

To the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Santanu Basu and I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support of LD 1962**, the bill to establish an independent Corrections Ombudsman in the state of Maine.

LD 1962 represents a necessary and long-overdue step toward transparency, accountability, and public trust within Maine's correctional system. An Ombudsman does not weaken public safety or undermine the work of corrections staff. Instead, it strengthens the system by ensuring that concerns are addressed fairly, consistently, and independently.

Currently, incarcerated individuals, their families, and even staff members have limited options for raising concerns without fear of retaliation or dismissal. Internal grievance systems often lack independence, and for many, they feel inaccessible or ineffective. This creates a gap between policy and practice, perception and reality. An independent Ombudsman helps close that gap.

The presence of a Corrections Ombudsman would:

- Provide a neutral and confidential avenue for complaints and concerns
- Identify systemic issues before they escalate into crises or litigation
- Improve conditions of confinement while supporting safe, professional working environments for staff
- Increase public confidence through transparency and oversight

Maine has an opportunity to lead with integrity. States that have implemented independent oversight have seen improvements not only in accountability, but also in safety, morale, and outcomes. Oversight is not about punishment, it is about learning, improvement, and responsibility.

For those directly impacted by the correctional system, an Ombudsman represents dignity and voice. For families, it offers reassurance. For staff, it provides a mechanism to raise concerns without undue risk. And for the public, it ensures that Maine's correctional system reflects our shared values of fairness, humanity, and justice.

I urge this Committee to support LD 1962 and move it forward with an **“ought to pass”** recommendation. An independent Corrections Ombudsman is not just good policy, it is good governance. Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your commitment to a safer and more accountable Maine.

Respectfully,

Santanu Basu

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