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Augusta
LD 1962

Testimony in Support of LD 1962: An Act to Establish the Corrections Ombudsman
January 7, 2026.

Good Afternoon Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Victoria McCarty I am a resident of Augusta and I am writing today to express strong support in favor of LD 1962. An independent Corrections Ombudsman would be a critical step toward ensuring transparency, accountability and above all justice.

LD 1962 would establish a dedicated, independent Corrections Ombudsman who is separate from the Department of Corrections. This person would:

- Listen to concerns from incarcerated individuals, their families, and correctional staff.
- Investigate complaints about conditions, treatment, and services in jails and prisons.
- Make recommendations for improvements based on those investigations.

Because the ombudsman would be independent, people could speak up without fear of retaliation. This independence is the cornerstone of an effective oversight mechanism.

Many people in Maine's correctional system live with mental health challenges, trauma, or substance-use disorders. This includes some members of my own family. In Maine's correctional system, incarcerated individuals often do not feel safe filing complaints or believe their concerns will be taken seriously. Families and loved ones likewise have no clear, confidential place to turn when something feels wrong. This lack of a trusted, external avenue for redress allows problems to fester and escalate. An independent ombudsman would provide a safe, confidential way to raise concerns. More importantly, the office would look at patterns and systemic problems, not just one-off complaints. By identifying and addressing root causes, the ombudsman can help prevent issues from growing into crises, harm, or even deaths.

The ombudsman's work would focus on recommending improvements in key areas such as:

- Mental health care
- Access to medication
- Conditions of confinement
- Re-entry planning and continuity of care

Having an independent reviewer ensures that a person's mental health needs are addressed without bias.

Evidence from Other States

Maine would not be venturing into uncharted territory. Several states have already established independent corrections ombudsman programs, and their experiences demonstrate the value of such oversight: For example:

Minnesota Office of the Ombuds for Corrections (OBFC) <https://mn.gov/obfc/>

Washington Office of the Corrections Ombuds (OCO) <https://oco.wa.gov/>

New Jersey Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson

<https://www.nj.gov/correctionsombudsperson/>

Connecticut Office of Correction Ombudsman <https://portal.ct.gov/oga/ombudsman>
(linked from state portal)

South Carolina SCDC Ombudsman <https://www.doc.sc.gov/> (ombudsman contact listed)

Kentucky Commonwealth Office of the Ombudsman

[https://kentucky.gov/government/Pages/AgencyProfile.aspx?Title=Office+of+the+Ombudsman+\(state+ombudsman+office\)](https://kentucky.gov/government/Pages/AgencyProfile.aspx?Title=Office+of+the+Ombudsman+(state+ombudsman+office))

These programs show that an independent ombudsman can operate effectively, build public trust, and drive systemic improvements without disrupting day-to-day correctional operations.

LD 1962 is a pragmatic, proven reform that would give incarcerated individuals, their

families, and correctional staff a credible, independent voice. It would help identify and fix problems before they become tragedies, and it would bring Maine in line vote towith a growing number of states that recognize the importance of independent prison oversight.

Therefore, I urge the committee to pass LD 1962. Thank you for your consideration and the important work you do for all Mainers.

Victoria McCarty

Augusta, Maine

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