



January 7th, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and esteemed members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

My name is Simonne Maline. I am the Executive Director for the Consumer Council System of Maine (CCSM). I am here today on behalf of the CCSM to testify **in support of LD 1962, “An Act to Establish the Corrections Ombudsman”**.

The Consumer Council System of Maine is a public instrumentality written into State Statute by the Maine Legislature to serve in an advisory capacity and to provide legislators and state government with guidance and advice regarding the delivery of effective and appropriate adult mental health services from those served by them.

We at CCSM believe that all people deserve dignity and agency, especially those who are in vulnerable positions, such as being incarcerated. There is a massive overrepresentation of people living with mental health challenges in our jails and prisons across the state. Many are held in custody with significant mental health conditions and often co-occurring substance use disorders. However, there is a serious lack of access to proper mental health care and continuity of medication access. Additionally, there is frequently no safe avenue for reporting concerns.

In 2021 the CCSM attempted a different version of this bill (LD 1009) with a lot of the same organizations and while we came worked as a stakeholder group, the report also sits in the legislative files. I point this out as the need has been with us for some years and yet we have not implemented any resources for individuals that are incarcerated.

A Corrections Ombudsman would be a vital resource for our peers and many other incarcerated individuals. We hear lived experience stories from various facilities around the state where an Ombudsman would have helped to address disparaging conditions. These grievances would be received by a confidential and impartial office rather than inaccessible internal systems. Addressing the types of systemic concerns that individuals in custody experience can literally save lives and promote recovery and healing.

We advocate for recovery-oriented measures/practices and believe that the accountability and transparency that an Ombudsman’s office provides would be aligned with these values. The prevention of harm and systemic improvements that come along with accountability are critical for strengthening trust and promoting restoration. We feel that this is an important and necessary intervention method for our justice system in Maine, and hope that the committee will consider our



state's commitment to mental health and humane treatment when voting on this bill.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to vote **ought to pass on LD 1962.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Simonne M. Maline

Executive Director