



**To:** Members of the Maine Legislature

**From:** Jeremy Tripp, Policy Director, One Voice United

**Date:** 1/6/2026

**Re:** S.P. 769 – An Act to Establish the Corrections Ombudsman

Dear Members of the Legislature,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on S.P. 769.

My name is Jeremy Tripp, and I serve as the Policy Director for One Voice United (OVU), a national organization focused on elevating the voices of front line corrections professionals while working collaboratively with lawmakers, agencies, and stakeholders to advance thoughtful, balanced reforms that strengthen correctional systems.

I am writing today because over the past several years, OVU has reviewed and provided technical input on corrections ombudsman legislation in multiple states, including most recently in Tennessee and Arizona. In each case, our engagement has been grounded in a belief that well structured oversight can improve transparency, build trust, and ultimately support safer facilities for the public along with both staff and those incarcerated.

With respect to S.P. 769, One Voice United takes a neutral position on the bill as currently written. We believe the concept of establishing a Corrections Ombudsman reflects a genuine effort to respond to persistent challenges facing correctional systems nationwide, including staffing shortages, recruitment and retention pressures, increased operational strain and violence, and aging infrastructure.

Maine is not immune to these problems, and the acknowledgment of their existence is neither a rebuke nor a negative reflection on the Maine Department of Corrections, its leadership, or the dedicated men and women working to meet its mission every single day.

To the contrary, these realities are a shared challenge of a corrections system that we've all inherited, and they require thoughtful and innovative responses from lawmakers such as yourselves.

In fact, OVU's neutrality on this proposal is informed by a desire to see this legislation succeed over time and ultimately serve in the best interest of the state, the DOC, corrections professionals and those being confined. To that end, based on our experience with other

models, we respectfully offer several considerations that we believe could strengthen the bill and improve its effectiveness.

First, independence is foundational. In our experience, the most effective Corrections Ombudsman offices are deliberately insulated from direct departmental or executive influence. An ombudsman who is appointed by and answers to the Legislature, or to a legislative committee, is a more durable and less political structure. This approach creates continuity as Governors, Commissioners or Directors change, and ensures the office remains focused on long-term system performance rather than shifting administrations.

Just as importantly, a legislative appointment and reporting structure allows the ombudsman to work directly on behalf of lawmakers as they carry out their constitutional oversight responsibilities. When the office is guided by the Legislature or its corrections committee, legislators are better positioned to obtain timely, credible answers to the questions they must ask when allocating resources, evaluating new initiatives, or assessing whether recently enacted laws and reforms are being implemented as intended.

Second, authority and access matter. Ombudsman offices that are able to meaningfully evaluate systemic issues have clearly defined access to records, staff, facilities, and data, along with transparent and frequent public reporting obligations. While we believe S.P 769 does a good job of defining certain statutory language, we recommend further evaluation of similar ombudsman positions to help avoid any ambiguity and ensure the office can act in real time, unencumbered, identifying trends and informing policy decisions.

Lastly, we urge careful consideration of resourcing and long-term sustainability. Even when unintentional, budgetary control and constraint can shape priorities and limit effectiveness. The strongest models we have seen treat independent and stable funding as essential to maintaining credibility and stability over time.

We offer these observations in the spirit of collaboration and believe this legislation has the potential of sending a strong message to the men and women working within the correctional system that their safety and contributions matter, and that the state is committed to strengthening its correctional system by implementing common-sense policy to tackle some of its biggest issues.

One Voice United appreciates the seriousness with which the Legislature is approaching this issue, and we stand ready to serve as a resource as discussions continue. Our goal, as always, is to support policies that strengthen correctional systems while honoring the professionals who work within them every day.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jeremy Tripp  
Policy Director  
One Voice United

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As a resident of Hermon, Maine I am respectfully submitting the attached testimony on behalf of One Voice United a national nonprofit organization of which I am the National Director. The testimony is written by One Voice United Director of Policy Jeremy Tripp. Thank you for your consideration.