

Honorable Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and Esteemed Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Deborah Sachare and I am writing with urgent concern and full support for LD 1962.

As I have come to learn the hard way, the Maine Department of Corrections is allowed to operate with very little transparency and no meaningful oversight from the public. I'm asking for your support for this bill, yes for the residents in MDOC, but also for the free people in the ecosystem who are victimized by the lack of oversight. Namely, the MDOC staff and family and loved ones of residents. I believe MDOC can be a system that operates well and takes decent care of the people who live and work within and around that system. But it is through painful personal experience that I know, it currently is not. My hope would be for an independent ombudsman office to finally bring some accountability to bear.

For the residents, I have seen the sometimes arbitrary nature of the MDOC disciplinary process and application and have learned how often those processes are unconstitutional in practice. Similarly with the grievance process. In current practice, the grievance process is likely to invite retaliation without actually solving the problem being grieved. An ombudsman could lower the risk of retaliation and increase the likelihood of problems being solved.

I was shocked to hear how badly prison staff need this office to be created. There have been many reports of staff hazing, sexual harassment and other forms of horizontal and vertical violence. Lawsuits have been filed by both security and nursing staff over the past several years. If an independent ombudsman office had been in place, maybe these staff members would have been heard when they reported the harmful behaviors and there could have been correction for them feel safe enough to stay in their jobs.

And finally, this position is needed for the friends, family, and loved ones with someone under MDOC care. The most perfect example of why is the fact that I am scared to share any personal stories that I have been through with you today. No one is looking, no one is listening, and it's free members of the community like me who pay the price and live in fear when MDOC is allowed to operate in the shadows.

In short, an independent ombudsman office has the potential to help residents, staff, and our community: ultimately leading to prisons that are safer to work in and more conducive to positive change in those incarcerated there.

Please, please, please vote "Ought to pass" on LD 1962. Thank you.