

Bob Staples
Brett M. Staples Brain Disorder Awareness Coalition
LD 1962

Testimony in Support of LD 1962 — An Act to Establish the Corrections
Ombudsman

Submitted by: Bob Staples

To: Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and members of the Committee:

My name is Bob Staples. President of the Brett M. Staples Brain Disorder Awareness Coalition. I am here today in strong support of LD 1962, An Act to Establish the Corrections Ombudsman.

I support this bill because Maine's correctional system is increasingly functioning as a de facto mental health system for people with serious brain disorders — a role it was never designed or equipped to play.

Many incarcerated people are living with conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, severe depression, PTSD, traumatic brain injury, and other neurological and psychiatric impairments. These conditions affect perception, impulse control, emotional regulation, and decision-making. Without proper treatment and oversight, incarceration often worsens these illnesses rather than stabilizing them.

A Corrections Ombudsman is essential because there is currently no independent, accessible, and confidential mechanism for incarcerated people or their families to raise concerns about care, safety, rights, or systemic failures.

An independent Ombudsman would:

- Provide a neutral place for incarcerated individuals and families to report concerns without fear of retaliation.
- Investigate complaints related to conditions of confinement, access to medical and mental health care, use of isolation, and safety.
- Identify patterns of systemic problems and recommend improvements before harm becomes tragedy.

This bill is not anti-corrections and not anti-staff. It is pro-transparency, pro-accountability, and pro-safety — for everyone inside the system, including staff.

When people with brain disorders are placed in environments that lack adequate treatment, structure, and clinical support, the result is predictable: decompensation, behavioral crises, self-harm, violence, and prolonged incarceration. This harms individuals, staff, and the broader community.

A Corrections Ombudsman helps ensure that people receive appropriate care, that policies are followed, and that warning signs are not ignored.

It also protects the state by identifying problems early, reducing litigation risk, improving outcomes, and strengthening public trust.

LD 1962 will not solve every problem in Maine's correctional system, but it is a practical, reasonable, and necessary step toward a system that is safer, more humane, more effective, and more accountable.

Supporting LD 1962 means acknowledging reality: jails and prisons now house a large number of people with serious brain disorders, and we have a responsibility to ensure that their basic needs, rights, and medical care are not neglected.

I urge you to support LD 1962.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Bob Staples