



Written Testimony of Bryan Widenhouse
State Legislative Affairs Manager, FAMM
Maine Joint Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
In Support of LD 1962
January 7, 2026

Dear Chair Beebe-Center, Chair Hasenfus, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

Thank you for the opportunity to support [LD 1962](#), an act to establish the Corrections Ombudsman in Maine. I write on behalf of [FAMM](#), a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates sentencing and prison policies that are individualized and fair, protect public safety, and preserve families. We unite current and formerly incarcerated people, their families and loved ones, and a diverse network of concerned citizens working to improve our system of justice. FAMM supports **LD 1962** and asks you to please vote “yes” on this legislation.

Prison oversight and offices of correctional ombudsmen have gained much traction over the last few years. Congress passed the Federal Prison Oversight Act by a vote of 392-2 in the House of Representatives and by unanimous consent in the Senate.¹ Additionally, in recent years, the states of Arizona², Maryland³, and Virginia⁴ have enacted laws like **LD 1962**.

The ombudsman would help the Maine Legislature assess the quality of care and work environment being provided in Maine's prison as well as the MDOC's budget and other needs more accurately. An independent ombudsman could provide the Legislature with unbiased, reliable, and accurate reports on the state of facilities and repairs, staffing needs, programming and food shortages, security risks, and dangerous conditions for staff and incarcerated people alike. This information would ensure the Legislature is informed and aware when it acts to improve MDOC, set its budget, and empower it to follow best practices. Through a strong independent prison oversight body, problems can be identified early and resolved efficiently before such problem becomes untenable leading to dangerous outcomes for staff and incarcerated people – and lawsuits for the state. The communities and families of Maine are best served by a correctional system that is safe and effective.

¹ Associated Press, “Congress OKs bill overhauling oversight of troubled federal Bureau of Prisons.” <https://apnews.com/article/federal-prisons-congress-oversight-abuse-transparency-a75ef934efd5d39bd5040deda1858391>. See also <https://www.congress.gov/bills/118th/congress/house-bill/3019>.

² <https://legiscan.com/AZ/bill/SB1507/2025>

³ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/Legislation/Details/SB0134?ys=2024RS>

⁴ <https://legiscan.com/VA/text/HB555/id/2983706>



Independent oversight benefits everyone.⁵ Corrections staff deserve a safe, healthy work environment and need a place to address complaints. Incarcerated people have a constitutional right to a safe, healthy, humane prison environment and need a place to go when the prison grievance process breaks down, or they have no safe place to turn to for help. Families of incarcerated people need someone to call when they cannot get help for their loved one despite following all MDOC's rules. Oversight encourages increased professionalism at every level of an agency and has proven successful in states such as Indiana.⁶ It is fundamentally a matter of good government and government transparency.

Please reach out to bwidenhouse@famm.org with any questions. Thank you for considering our views.

Respectfully,

/s/ Bryan Widenhouse

Bryan Widenhouse

State Legislative Affairs Manager

⁵ FAMM, "Improving transparency and accountability through independent prison oversight."
<https://famm.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Benefits-of-prison-oversight.pdf>.

⁶ The Indiana Department of Corrections Ombudsman Bureau was created by the legislature in the fall of 2003.
<https://www.in.gov/idoc/divisions/ombudsman/>