



Lisa M. Keim
Senator, District 19
Assistant Republican Leader

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

Testimony of Senator Lisa Keim before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
LD 653, An Act to Support Constitutionally Required Public Defense by Creating the
Maine Office of Public Defense Services
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Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. I am Lisa Keim, and I proudly represent the citizens of Senate District 19, which includes much of Northern Oxford County and communities in Franklin County. I am here to present LD 653, “An Act to Support Constitutionally Required Public Defense by Creating the Maine Office of Public Defense Services.”

The concept of my bill is simple, though the title makes it sound more ambitious than it means to be.

Simply put, the current name of Maine’s agency that is responsible for providing public defense to people unable to financially afford representation themselves, does not fit the activity.

The public defense system in our state, currently named the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services (MCILS), can be accurately described as a group of Commission members that direct an office that oversees and provides legal defense for the poor. The current name of Maine’s system of public defense is confusing, and make it extremely difficult to advocate on the behalf of indigent people who, under the 6th Amendment, are entitled to legal defense paid for by the Maine taxpayers.

Maine people, who are required to pay the bill for their fellow Mainer’s defense, should at minimum have the unit described using words that they readily understand.

I have heard the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services shortened to any number of monikers: Mickels, ILS, MCILS, miklas, and worst but least, Manekills.

When I first entered the Legislature, I myself had no idea what was being referred to as Indigent Legal Services. I, like many others upon hearing the word indigent, immediately thought of the word indigenous—a word far removed from what this agency is all about.

If we are to advocate in the Legislature and to the broader community in Maine to fund the work of this essential agency, at minimum the office needs a name that regular people immediately understand.

This name change should not wait. The current name of MCILS does a disservice to the people who are advocating for the 6th amendment rights of all Mainers.