



# Maine Sheriffs' Association

*"One Team, One Mission"*

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April 12, 2023

## **L.D. 1204 – An Act To Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Closing Coverage Gaps in the MaineCare Program for Incarcerated Persons**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Dale P. Lancaster, I am the sheriff of Somerset County and the President of the Maine Sheriffs Association. I am here today on their behalf.

The fifteen county and regional jails in Maine are quite different than the correctional facilities operated by the state and it's important to understand the distinction between the two and how passage of L.D. 1204 will impact our jails. Maine's county jails are often referred to as the emergency rooms of the penal system. When an individual is taken into custody, they're frequently suffering from substance use disorder, intoxication, or mental health issues. Maine jails immediately identify the needs of this individual and design a plan for meeting those needs. This differs from the intakes at state facilities as their intakes are detoxed and already enrolled in programming.

The Maine Sheriffs conducted an informal survey of medical costs in current jail budgets with Cumberland reporting over \$3,000,000 in medical costs, \$1,400,00 in my own county, and Aroostook budgeting close to \$1,000,000. When you consider that when a MaineCare recipient becomes incarcerated, their benefits are suspended during their incarceration, it becomes evident immediately that these costs become the responsibility of county property taxpayers.

Most individuals that come into our facilities receive treatment and counseling and are released without being sentenced to a state facility. We would argue that this population is among the most vulnerable in the State. Remember, once they became incarcerated, their MaineCare is suspended. We are releasing these individuals back into the community without health care at a time when they're most in need. The passage of L.D. 1204 will ensure that those individuals already identified as MaineCare recipients will not have their healthcare coverage interrupted, removing the gap in which many will be looking to continue those services initiated in Maine's jails.

Speaker Talbot Ross has amended the language of this bill to mandate that the state submit a state plan amendment which, if approved, would allow all MaineCare recipients to retain their healthcare coverage while they're incarcerated. This is an important shift as currently; Maine jails are struggling with skyrocketing health care costs. This change would not simply cover inmates' healthcare, but we believe the coverage would allow for greater services. All Maine jails provide medically assisted treatment or MAT. We know that there are a variety of medications to treat substance use disorders, however, we also know some of the preferable

medications are too expensive for county jail budgets. As a result, many jails use daily dose medications for those inmates when we know a monthly injection to support addiction control has significant success in preventing relapses. Additionally, access to monthly injections for inmates battling substance use disorder would provide the added and unintended benefit of reducing the workload of our already over-burdened staff members as they would administer once-a-month injections rather than daily administration to hundreds of incarcerated persons.

We anticipate there will be those in opposition to this bill as the misperception of added costs is examined but it's important to remember that we're discussing individuals that are already enrolled in MaineCare. Our argument is that they've already been approved for this coverage, we are asking that they retain this vital coverage during their incarceration.

Maine Sheriffs applaud Speaker Talbot Ross for acknowledging that we can and must do more for those individuals who need healthcare at a most critical time. Maine Sheriffs unanimously support L.D. 1204 and we urge the esteemed members of this committee to unanimously vote Ought To Pass on L.D. 1204.

Thank you for your consideration and it would be my pleasure to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Dale P. Lancaster, President  
Maine Sheriffs Association