

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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Testimony in opposition to LD 994 and LD 1545 to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety April 18, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen and a person in long-term recovery.* I am testifying on behalf of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition whose goal is to promote restorative practices in order to increase public safety and the health of our community.

These bills seek to make it easier to convict someone of trafficking. Their only effect in the real world will be to make life easier for law enforcement and prosecutors.

Despite the optimistic titles, these bills will not decrease overdose deaths and likely will increase them.

Policymakers in the United States increasingly recognize that drug use should be treated as a public health issue instead of a criminal issue. Nevertheless, many continue to support harsh criminal sentences for people who are involved with drug selling or distribution. Many imagine these people are “predators” or “pushers” who force drugs on the vulnerable, contributing to addiction, overdose and violent crime.¹

That mistaken generalization has been pushed by law enforcement agencies and is one that has cost us dearly. These bills will help

¹ See Rethinking the “Drug Dealer”, research by the Drug Policy Alliance, 2019, at <https://drugpolicy.org/drugsellers>

* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.

them increase their trafficking convictions but do almost nothing to actually make us safer.

We KNOW that targeting traffickers does NOT reduce drug use. It does not reduce demand. It does not reduce supply. It does NOT make people safer.

Instead, targeting traffickers increases our costs for incarceration, takes money away from intervention and harm reduction, and there is good evidence that it actually **increases** drug overdoses and deaths.

We urge you to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1545.

Thank you for your generous attention.

I'd be happy to try to answer questions.