

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



April 19, 2023

Greetings Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee

My name is Jan Collins, I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. I am here in support of LD 609 An Act to Ensure an Incarcerated Individuals Right to Make Free Phone Calls Protected by Attorney Client Privilege".

MPAC's mission is to support Maine's incarcerated citizens, their families, and friends, in their struggle with Maine's criminal justice system. Our purpose is to reduce Maine's use of incarceration by creating a criminal justice system that is ethical, humane, and restorative in nature.

Justice delayed is justice denied.

We have heard from the courts and attorneys, both prosecuting and defense, that court dockets are backed up for years into the future. Sheriffs report that the percentage of residents in their jails who are pretrial is often greater than 80%. It is not unusual for individuals to serve a longer term pre-trial than their sentence would be for the crime. All of this at great expense to the community, to children and families, and to individuals.

You have heard me argue that since the 70's we have set a distressing precedent of jailing people who would be better served in a medical setting especially people with mental health and substance use disorder diagnosis.

These two things alone would empty our jails and lighten the loads of our courts. Until that happens we must make do with baby steps.

This bill makes a simple request, allow residents of Maine jails and prisons to call their attorney's for free. Currently, Maine jails and prisons charge fees for phone calls that are considerably higher than the cost of calls made by you and I to each other. It is families and loved ones who pay these costs despite the financial hardships of expensive calls. The profit is held by the prison or jail in an account called the inmate benefit fund (IBF). Some jails and prisons are holding hundreds of thousands of dollars in these IBFs.

Phone calls to attorneys should be a priority use of these funds. There can be no higher use for this money than **justice**.

Allowing for free phone calls will help save time for attorneys who may be far away from their clients. Consulting by phone will allow them to save time on travel. Allowing attorneys to spend more time on defense and less on travel will speed up the resolution of cases.

Phone calls will make it easier for clients to participate in their defense in meaningful ways.

Most important, this simple change will make the criminal legal system more **just** for all those involved.

I urge you to support passage of LD 609.
Thank-you for your consideration.

Jan M. Collins
Assistant Director
Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition
PO Box 360, E. Wilton, ME 04234
207.578.8419