

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



Tuesday, April 25 2023

Greetings Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and Honorable Members of the Criminal Justice Committee and Public Safety Committee

My name is Jan Collins, I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. I am here to support LD 1543 Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Recommend Cost-effective, Safe, Administrable and Healthful Programs to Reduce Violence in Prisons and Jails.

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.

There is no doubt that there is violence in Maine's prisons and jails. I do not think that anyone would be surprised to hear that. Jails and prisons are where we put people who are having difficulty with mental health issues, those who have suffered terrible trauma, people suffering from substance use disorder and those who have broken the social contract. All a result of these situations, a disproportionate number of veterans are incarcerated. Maine State Prison has a housing unit dedicated to veterans. These are people who have stepped into harms way and who have often experienced the unimaginable for their country and yet they are incarcerated.

There are also large numbers of people who have experienced unspeakable childhood trauma as witnessed by their time in the foster care system.

You will hear testimony on the statistics, the high number of suicides, drug overdoses, and murders that occur in our carceral facilities and the impact on corrections staff of witnessing this pain on a daily basis. But the number of disciplinary infractions or the numbers of deaths, do not capture the human costs.

The ring of people affected by each act of harm ripples out like a stone cast in water. Imagine the impact on the person that must enter the cell after a hanging and take down the body, or the staff who must call the family, the mother who must hear of their loss, the children who will be without a parent.

Violence in prisons and jails affects all of us no matter where we are in the pond.

This bill is simple in concept and design. It asks us to look at the conditions present when an act of violence occurs in a jail or prison so that we can identify what contributing factors surrounded the event.

If we know what those factors are, and they may be different in jails and prisons, we can then investigate programs that have been successful in mitigating those conditions.

In doing so we will help heal our friends and neighbors who are incarcerated and we will make our communities safer. Isn't that what all of us want?

Thank-you for your support.

With appreciation,

Jan M. Collins

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