



Pinny Beebe-Center
Senator, District 12

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Pinny Beebe-Center introducing

LD 1626, "An Act to Standardize Requirements Between Boards of Visitors for County Jails and Department of Corrections Correctional Facilities"

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
April 25, 2023**

Good afternoon, Representative Salisbury and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. I am Senator Pinny Beebe-Center, and I represent all of Knox County, except for Isle Au Haut and the town of Washington I am pleased to present to you LD 1626 "An Act to Standardize Requirements Between Boards of Visitors for County Jails and Department of Corrections Correctional Facilities."

This bill brings parity to the Maine Department of Corrections and the county jails' Boards of Visitors by adding the best provisions of each of the statutes to the other's statute. The only new addition is a provision for Board of Visitor training. This paragraph was added by request of individuals serving on Boards of Visitors.

The provisions of this bill are already in place in Franklin County where the Board of Visitors has been operating under the conditions outlined in this bill for several years. That Board was formed with the encouragement of Sheriff Scott Nichols and includes regular training and orientation of new members of the Board of Visitors and with access to the jail at any time (with very limited exceptions such as during a communicable disease outbreaks or an emergency situation like a lockdown).

Franklin is one of Maine's less populous counties. Nonetheless, the BOV has been operating with a full complement of board members in each of the categories outlined in this bill. Although the sheriff is not here to talk about his experiences, Jan Collins, who is a member of the Franklin County Board of Visitors, will relate more about the positive aspects of the bill and how they have led to a complementary and reinforcing relationship between the Sheriff's department and the Board.

Here are some of the positive outcomes of having a strong Board of Visitors.

1. Board members are from all of the larger towns in the county and are able to talk knowledgeably to members of their communities regarding the needs of the jail and the benefits to the community;
2. Board members are from a variety of different professional backgrounds and are able to act as liaisons with their professions and the corrections facility, each providing important knowledge and experience to the other and opening up community conversations;
3. Board members are advocates for creating healthy, recovery based programming at the jail and they have connections to help the jail meet their programming goals.

Jails are in place to care for their residents and to serve their communities. This bill allows for members of the community to contribute to the conversation about how best to make that happen. I thank you for your time and consideration. I invite you to direct your questions to Jan Collins of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition.