

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 1626 An Act to Standardize Requirements Between Boards of Visitors for County Jails and Department of Corrections Correctional Facilities and to share my experiences as a member of the Franklin County Board of Visitors.

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.

Very often this committee is asked to endorse changes in policy that have never been tried. This bill is not one of them. All of the provisions in this bill have been in practice at Franklin County Jail for years. Far from being onerous, they have been a great asset to the community and to the jail administration.

The Board of Visitors, Sheriff and Correctional Staff work together in a spirit of mutual respect and support. As a result, the BOV has supported the jail and its staff at County Budget hearings, in the legislature and with the public and other community organizations.

When the Board of Visitors receives a question or concern from the public, we work together to find solutions that work for everyone involved, residents of the facility, staff, and the community. As a result, Franklin County Jail was one of the first to institute medication assisted treatment(MAT) services for anyone at the facility who was diagnosed with opioid use disorder(OD) and requested treatment. Everyone at the jail can participate in training to administer naloxone and receive the lifesaving medication upon release. Peer recovery coaches have regular access to anyone at the jail who requests their resources and anyone who participates in opioid recovery services at the jail is also provided with a follow-up appointment with a community health provider before release.

We regularly visit the jail, although those visits were on hold during the covid epidemic, and when we do visit we talk to people in all aspects of jail operations. We interview the jail administrator, talk to the sheriff, individuals in the control room, residents, medical staff, and other providers and volunteers at the facility. We also review the MDOC biennial review of the facility.

It is these interviews that are the basis of our report and recommendations. The sheriff always has a chance to respond to the report before it is submitted to the County commissioners. This year the sheriff had no additions as he felt the document captured the year well.

The rapport that we treasure, took time to develop. I am sure that there was some wariness from staff initially. But working together to identify how we can improve the services we provide and to solve problems, has been an opportunity for strengthening the bonds between the jail and the community, and it has done just that.

I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions about the membership of our committee, our meetings, or any issues that we have resolved as a result of working together.

Please give your unanimous support of LD 1626 An Act to Standardize Requirements Between Boards of Visitors for County Jails and Department of Corrections Correctional Facilities

Thank you for your consideration.

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BOV Franklin County Jail

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