



**Consumer Council System of Maine**  
A Voice for Consumers of Mental Health Services

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Good **afternoon**, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and esteemed members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Simonne Maline. I am the Executive Director for the Consumer Council System of Maine (CCSM). I am here today on behalf of the CCSM to testify in support of **LD “1626 An Act to Standardize Requirements Between Boards of Visitors for County Jails and Department of Corrections Correctional Facilities”**.

The Consumer Council System of Maine is a public instrumentality written into State Statute by the Maine Legislature to serve in an advisory capacity and to provide legislators with guidance and advice regarding the delivery of effective and appropriate adult mental health services from those served by them.

The CCSM spends a significant amount of time listening to our fellow peers around the State through our Local Councils and statewide forums. We have several council members who sit on their county's boards of visitors. What they recount is a wide variety of differences between county jails. Some counties are doing much better than others who may not even have boards of visitors at all, even though they are required to have them.

We talked with both Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition and Maine Prisoner Re-Entry Network about these issues and worked to bring them forward to you today for your consideration.

We want to see a uniformity of the language between DOC and counties. They should have the basic standards that are uniform and then they have room to address all the different unique issues to their location.

We feel that it is important to have individuals with lived experience of being in a correctional facility. It should be required for all boards of visitors. Their voice is invaluable to these conversations.

We also feel it is important to have public information and access to their reports, meetings, and the board members themselves. Last fall I tried to attend a DOC board of visitors meeting in Warren. The wrong date was posted on the website and there was not a remote option. **In the recent past** if you **went** to the DOC Windham page their board of visitors **had** their meeting time and a zoom link posted for the public to attend (I just looked again and that is now gone) just like we do today at the Legislature!

We would suggest you look at the Penobscot County website as an example of how information concerning Board of Visitors meetings could be shared with the general public.

<https://www.penobscot-sheriff.net/boardOfVisitors/603fdc281a5a216bfc4bdb55>



One of the most important pieces of this bill is the training for those that serve on Boards. No one goes to a job without training. **Otherwise, how would** they know what is required of them? We often learn these things through on-the-job training!

Also, we feel these boards need to submit reports and be accountable for their work including reporting back to the Legislature yearly. This information is valuable to many entities.

While we appreciate the Maine Commissioners Association thoughtful testimony, they state: "... Additionally, the average time that inmates spend in a county jail is between two and five days, which inhibits an inmate's participation in impactful treatment programs prior to release...". We researched several county jail websites and found through their online census records that there were individuals still residing in these jails since 2022. These individuals should surely be front and center for treatment programs if needed prior to release.

Boards of visitors are the only independent entity that has the capacity to let the rest of the community know how well or not the jail or correctional facilities are doing. They are our eyes and ears in these **facilities that can ensure the safety and wellbeing of incarcerated residents**. Let us give them every tool possible to be a voice for those that truly need it.

In closing I urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1626.

Sincerely,

*Simonne M. Maline*

Executive Director