

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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Testimony in support of LD 1633 to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety April 25, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen and a person in long-term recovery.* I am testifying in support of LD 1633 on behalf of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition whose goal is to promote restorative practices in order to increase public safety and the health of our community.

This bill recognizes that the key to successful reentry is support on both sides of the wall—support both before release and on-going support after release.

Traditionally, reentry has meant the DOC staff handing off, or passing off, the reentrant, to various community resources. Handing them over the wall.

Instead, we have learned that the most successful model of reentry is a **single process of accompaniment and support through the transition**. For this, the key element is a community based organization, working with residents within the walls before release, walking through the gate with them, and welcoming the returning citizen into the community.

The importance and power of this model was consistently demonstrated by the Maine Prisoner Re-Entry Network operating both inside the prisons and outside until disrupted by COVID. Since then Zoom has partially allowed some operating inside but not as successfully.

* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.

This bill proposes a model where the contracted community organization would have staff and physical space within all DOC facilities, operating in cooperation with the DOC. That staff would represent the welcoming Community—not the Department of Corrections.

For residents and their successful reentry, this will make all the difference.

And I hardly need to remind this committee how important and economical successful reentry is to our communities and our State.

We urge you to support LD 1633.

Thank you for your generous attention.

I'd be happy to try to answer questions.