

# Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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## **Testimony in Opposition to LD 18 and LD 45 to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety**

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Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, 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 opposition to both LD 18 and LD 42 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.

Both of these bills seek to increase fees that the MDOC can charge residents, for healthcare in LD 18 and for technology in LD 45.

The Maine Department of Corrections (MDOC) budget includes almost zero dollars for programs, including recreational programs, educational programs, and treatment programs. These are mostly funded by the Resident Benefit Fund (RBF).

RBF money primarily comes from MDOC markups on Commissary purchases and from markups on telephone calls.

In other words, RBF money mostly comes from families and loved ones of residents. Put another way, these profits are a TAX on families of the incarcerated.

We believe that basketballs and educational programs and counseling and treatment programs are a State responsibility.

The Mission of the Maine Department of Corrections is “**Making our Communities Safer by Reducing Harm through Supportive Intervention, Empowering Change, and Restoring Lives**”

Supportive intervention, empowering change and restoring lives require PROGRAMS—educational, therapeutic and recreational programs. Exactly **the programs and support that Maine does NOT fund.**

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

Encouraging support and connection with families and loved ones is such an important tool in Corrections that the Federal prison system has **free** telephone and other electronic contact. By charging fees and making profits, the MDOC sabotages its own mission, turning effective programs into profit centers.

Both these bills increase taxes on residents and families and weaken the connections between residents and their outside support. This is contrary to the MDOC mission.

The answer is in YOUR laps: the Legislature must allocate **adequate funding** to the MDOC to accomplish its stated mission without imposing a tax on families.

Thank you for your attention.

I'm happy to try to answer any questions.