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Testimony of Rep. Adam Lee presenting

LD 45, An Act Allowing the Department of Corrections to Offset Some of the Costs of Technology Provided to Residents of Correctional Facilities
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am Adam Lee, and I represent House District 89 which is Downtown Auburn and New Auburn. I'm here to introduce LD 45, An Act Allowing the Department of Corrections to offset some of the Costs of Technology Provided to Residents of Correctional Facilities.

This is a Department of Corrections bill, and the Department is here with substantially more information and detail than I have, and so I'll ask that you defer your questions for them. I will, however, briefly explain to you why I agreed to sponsor this bill.

Upon hearing its name and a request that I sponsor it, I was skeptical. As many of you know, for the past 3 years I have helped to coach the Maine State Prison's Debate team. I coach that team in conjunction with the National Prison Debate League. It's through conversations with the folks from the NPDLE that I've learned just how exemplary Maine is in comparison to other states in providing technological and educational opportunities for residents. We truly are ahead of the curve. My chief concern in seeing the title of the bill is that the Department intended to take something that it is excellent and is presently being provided to residents for free and charge them for it. My sponsorship is based on a few understandings, each of which I'd invite you to challenge the Department on.

First, my understanding is that this bill is not intended to supplant DOC attempts to fund these programs through available grants or other resources, it's to supplement that funding. Second, my sponsorship is based on the guarantee that residents will not be charged for their use of technology in conjunction with their own criminal defense or involvement in civil law suits. Third, my sponsorship is based on the assurance that the inability to pay for the service will not preclude someone from using it and will not preclude them from being selected to participate in programs like debate, which require use of the technology. Fourth, I spoke to the department and genuinely believe that there will be some element of empowerment for residents if the service is, in part, funded by the residents. It will be a heck of a lot more difficult to ignore residents' concerns about the quality or availability of technological services if they are financially contributing to them.

So, again, I'd appreciate and encourage you to ask questions of the Department. I'd also encourage you to work the bill to ensure that it serves to protect these technological services and the educational programs they serve.

Thanks,
Adam R. Lee