

# Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



January 27, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Jan Collins, I am Assistant Director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC) an organization committed to ethical, positive, and humane changes in Maine's prison system.

I am here in opposition to **LD 45 An Act Allowing the Department of Corrections to Offset Some of the Costs of Technology Provided to Residents of Correctional Facilities.**

The MDOC stated mission is "*Making our Communities Safer by Reducing Harm through Supportive Intervention, Empowering Change, and Restoring Lives.*" It is noble work that MPAC fully supports.

However, we have long been puzzled by the lack of funding in the DOC budget to support that mission. In the Nov 2017 issue of DownEast magazine, Ryan Thornell, then Maine's associate commissioner for corrections said of then Warden Randall Liberty, "He fits well because we don't have a programming budget, number one. It's an area of corrections that often gets overlooked. "

What was striking about that quote is not that Randall Liberty was doing so well at his job, but that he was doing it without a budget for programs. How is the DOC to fulfill its mission to empower and restore lives without the budget to do so?

Unfortunately, the answer has been to glean those funds from some of the least resourced people in Maine. Our prisons are filled with people who are sick, poorly educated, and without financial resources. Their families are also struggling financially.

Yet it is these families who the DOC relies on to pay for programming. The department charges above market rates for phone calls, texting accounts, commissary items, and photos in the visit room. They skim profits from these items to pay inmate wages, buy basketballs for the gym, pay staff in education, and more.. skimming over a million dollars each year from those who can least afford it.<sup>2</sup>

It is time that the DOC budget include the funds necessary to provide the level of programming essential to successful rehabilitation.

Struggling families cannot continue to bear the burden of paying for prisons with their taxes and paying again with fees. If the state is serious about the safety of our communities and the rehabilitation and redemption of those it houses, programming should be a line item in the budget.

**There are already too many fees.**

There is a need for updated technology. In the past the Department has applied for and received grants to buy computers. Federal grants for public entities were available to expand and upgrade technology in the last year. The Board of Visitors of Franklin County Jail worked with the Sheriff to apply for a technology grant for that jail. Did MDOC also apply for these grants which could saved money both for state taxpayers and the working families of those incarcerated at MSP?

I urge the committee to oppose this bill and fund programming through the budget process or through available technology grants.

With appreciation,

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<sup>1</sup>**Liberty's Prison** <https://downeast.com/issues-politics/maine-state-prison/>

<sup>2</sup>**As Maine Families Struggle to Afford 15 Minute Phone Calls from Jail, Maine Counties Rake in Millions** <https://themainemonitor.org/as-families-struggle-to-afford-15-minute-phone-calls-from-jail-maine-counties-rake-in-millions/>