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**TESTIMONY OF**

**MARK SPAHR, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY  
MAINE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**

**January 27, 2025**

**In Support of:**

**LD 45, An Act Allowing the Department of Corrections to Offset Some of the Costs of Technology Provided to Residents of Correctional Facilities**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am Mark Spahr, Director of Education Technology for the Maine Department of Corrections (DOC). I am here today providing testimony in strong support of LD 45, An Act Allowing the Department of Corrections to Offset Some of the Costs of Technology Provided to Residents of Correctional Facilities. As I will explain today, this bill is a key department initiative designed to support the continued existence of some of our most impactful programs. The Department thanks Representative Lee for sponsoring this bill on our behalf.

Among the many innovative programs and initiatives within the Maine Department of Corrections there is one especially unique feature to our system, the Resident Education Technology Network (“Education Network” for short). By now most of you are aware of the robust education and credentialing opportunities within our system. You also heard last week about our remote work opportunities, recently reported on by the Boston Globe, and are likely to be aware of our participation in the National Prison Debate League. Each of these are examples of key programs and initiatives within our Department that are designed to set residents on a path to self-betterment, reduce recidivism, and increase the likelihood that they are able to find success in the community to which they eventually return. These examples also happen to be programs that would not be possible to support in their current form or scale without our Education Network.

The Education Network is, at its core, a secure internet network set up specifically for our resident population. It is completely separate from the State of Maine network, and it relies entirely on its own hardware. This means that the hardware the network is built upon does not cross over with the network used by our staff. This separation is necessary for security reasons. Our teams handle a lot of sensitive information both about our clients and related to their roles as State employees, and that reality simply presents too great a security vulnerability to host resident activity on the same network.

The creation of the Education Network has allowed our department to explore opportunities that other correctional institutions simply could never entertain. Of the approximately 1800 residents in our system, nearly 800 have some form of computer access. One common refrain we often hear from corrections partners across the country, is that they’d never be able to receive funding for such a system. This brings us to another unique feature of the Education Network. It was created without relying on any appropriated funds provided by the Maine Legislature. Instead, it was created through our strategic utilization of federal grant funding and donations provided by outside education partners.

The primary grant relied upon to create this network was the federal Epidemiological and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) grant established during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past several years, this grant has been instrumental in advancing the Department’s technological infrastructure. Funds from the ELC grant supported the development of the Education Network, enabling enhanced connectivity for educational initiatives. The grant also facilitated the purchase of



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critical hardware, including servers, firewalls, WiFi access points (APs), and both desktop and laptop computers. Additionally, it funded software solutions such as Action1, a cloud-based endpoint management system that allows for remote monitoring, software deployment, and security updates. This ensured robust and efficient operational capabilities across our facilities. The ELC grant played a vital role in modernizing and strengthening the department's resident facing technology resources.

Unfortunately, the funds from this grant officially expired at the end of July 2024. With the expiration of this funding, the department now faces the challenge of identifying new funding sources to sustain its current infrastructure. Maintaining operational reliability will require ongoing investment in software licensing, hardware upkeep, and technical support. Additionally, the need to replace aging hardware in the coming years will further increase financial demands. Securing alternative funding streams will be essential to ensure that the technological advancements made with the ELC grant are not only preserved but also built upon to meet future needs. That reality is the origin of the proposal before you today.

Within this bill our Department is seeking the authority to establish a fee structure for residents that utilize the education technology network. The fee structure is outlined on page 9 of the 2024 Education Technology Annual Report provided alongside this testimony. The key idea behind this proposal is twofold. First, the technology fees will go into a special account that may only be used to support the Education Network. The fees we have outlined are reasonable rates based on a resident's use of the system and, over time, they will be adequate to support the ongoing sustainability of our Department continuing to provide this system at no cost to the Maine tax-payer. Second, this fee structure will support our mission of normalization by giving residents a level of stewardship over the system they benefit from. Through the fee structure residents will be directly supporting the system they rely upon in the same way that people in the community are responsible for paying their internet bills. This level of responsibility is important for preparing people for the realities of reentry to the community and also creates an incentive to take care of the system they are utilizing. This is a model that builds upon the principles we've implemented across our system in units like the Earned Living Unit at Maine State Prison, where a high level of privilege is coupled with a high level of responsibility.

Of course, this bill has built within it clear protections to ensure that residents who are not able to pay are not prevented from using this network. This bill also provides clear protections to ensure that the authority provided in this bill will never be used to charge residents who are relying upon technology for the purpose of research related to a criminal case or civil lawsuit in which the resident is involved. These protections are essential to ensure that access to technology in our system is both fair and consistent with the rights of residents our residents.

Finally, in addition to the 2024 Education Technology Annual Report, we have also provided a couple handouts alongside this testimony. Each of you should have a copy of our Education Continuum handout, as well as a copy of the Boston Globe story from December. I hope these resources are helpful in highlighting how the Resident Education Technology Network stands as a cornerstone of the work we do.



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For the reasons stated above, the department respectfully asks for the committee's support in this proposal.

This concludes my testimony.

I am happy to answer questions.

Mark Spahr  
Director of Education Technology  
Maine Department of Corrections