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DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
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04333-0111

RANDALL A. LIBERTY
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY OF

SAM PRAWER, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS MAINE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

February 10, 2025

Neither for nor against:

LD 244, An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Indigent Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am Sam Praver, Director of Government Affairs at the Maine Department of Corrections (DOC). I am here today providing testimony neither for nor against LD 244, An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Indigent Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities.

This bill appears to be a successor to LD 1514 from the 131st Legislature. However, as printed, it reflects the original version of that bill, not the version that was reported out of committee. The previous version that was reported out of committee would have provided \$200,000 to DOC to establish a pilot program with a community-based organization to provide transitional living services for individuals recently released from correctional facilities.

I want to begin by stating that our Department is very supportive of what this bill is trying to accomplish. As we stated during another public hearing earlier this session, the ability to secure housing is one of the key factors to ensuring success upon reentry. Current housing prices and stock have made that increasingly difficult for many leaving our system.

This is why we've put so much effort into establishing the two transitional housing programs for adults currently operated by the Department (Leading the Way, in Bangor, for men; and Way Point, in Auburn, for women – which will be operational in the next couple months). These facilities provide up to six months of rent-free housing to men and women leaving our system, with the possibility to extend if needed. Clients who take advantage of these programs are required to work with our teams on a plan to find and maintain employment and long-term housing, as well as set aside 25% of their income to plan for housing costs upon leaving the programs. We believe this model supports normalization and helps us get closer to the ideal warm hand-off back to the community that we strive for. Transitional housing is, in so many ways, Maine Model of Corrections.

That being said, we must be clear that we cannot support any proposal which includes spending that falls outside the scope of the Governor's proposed budget. For that reason, we remain neither for nor against this proposal. We also have a few concerns with the bill as printed, however, it is our understanding that the sponsor intends to propose an amendment that addresses each of these concerns. We believe the proposal being put forward by the sponsor today, is a much more workable program model with a much clearer fiscal impact. For that reason, I have noted the concerns below but will not read through them today.



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Our concerns with the bill, as printed, include the following:

- **Definition of Indigent:** As printed the bill requires DOC to provide transitional living services for all indigent individuals recently released from correctional facilities. However, the bill does not define “indigent” and therefore it is difficult to tell how many individuals this requirement would apply to. The scope of that definition could dramatically impact the potential fiscal cost of this proposal.
- **Timeframe:** The bill as printed requires DOC to provide two months of transitional housing. However, two months is not an ideal timeframe, as it does not allow enough time for clients to save and plan for their next steps. This is why we have chosen six months for our current transitional housing programs.
- **Design.** Leading the Way currently offers private bedrooms with shared bathrooms, kitchen, and living room spaces. We believe that is a good model, but it would not be supported under the bill as printed.
- **Agency Roles:** It is unclear how DOC and Maine State Housing Authority would manage the joint responsibilities over this program, or if Maine State Housing Authority is even an entity that is appropriate or interested in being involved with providing these programs. We’d also want to have further conversations with Maine State Housing Authority before agreeing to the study proposed in Section 2.

This concludes my testimony.

I am happy to answer questions.

Sam Prawer
Director of Government Affairs
Maine Department of Corrections