

# Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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## **Testimony in opposition to LD 535 to the Committee on Judiciary**

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*Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, 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 LD 535 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.

MPAC's position is that it is **inhumane and unacceptable for juveniles to be tried, treated or sentenced as adults.**

This bill seeks to allow juveniles to be sentenced like adults **without even the due process of being tried as adults.** It circumvents the bind-over procedure and its safeguards. This multiplies the injustice.

The premise of juvenile justice is that youth cannot be held responsible because they are not yet capable of making binding decisions or understanding the long-term consequences of their actions. This premise is reflected in age of consent laws, voting laws, limits on purchasing or consuming substances, driving and other licensing laws, not being able to enter into binding contracts, and many others.

**Mens Rea** is fundamental to our legal system and juveniles do not have it.

Moreover, we know that race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status and many other extraneous characteristics are applied in these decisions to try youth as adults. This compounds the violation of **fundamental human rights.**

We ask you to unanimously reject this bill.

Thank you for your attention. I'm happy to try to answer any questions.

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