

# Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



February 26, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Judiciary 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 support of LD 246 Alternative Sentencing for Primary Caregivers sponsored by Senator Talbot Ross.

My support is informed by personal experience. When I was two years old my father's incarceration left my family without its only bread winner. My mother had four children under the age of 5. Without an income, we lost our apartment and would have been homeless, but for a plywood trailer my uncle used to haul around to county fairs when showing his dairy cows. The trailer was located in the lower cow pasture. It had no running water or plumbing. At night, my sister and I were tucked in at either end of the top bunk and my mother shared the bottom bunk with my infant and toddler brothers.

I have often wondered how my life, my families life, and especially my father's life would have been different if he had been offered treatment for his alcohol use disorder instead of imprisonment.

My Dad's incarceration was a pivotal moment for us. It thrust us into deep poverty. Sixty five percent of families with a member in prison or jail cannot meet basic needs. One in four of the children in these families is under the age of five and more than 75% live in low income households.<sup>1</sup>

The effect on children is not only physical, it is emotional and psychological. The initial trauma often leads to isolation and mental health struggles.<sup>1</sup> Children with incarcerated parents are three times more likely to

suffer depression or behavioral issues. (Children don't necessarily say how they feel; they act it out.) Children with an incarcerated parent are twice as likely to develop learning disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's study of the effects of incarceration on families and children titled, *A Shared Sentence*, indexes eighty scholarly works on the subject. The evidence is insurmountable, when a parent goes to prison or jail the whole family goes to prison.

Ultimately, we must find a way to rehabilitate parents and other caregivers in a community setting that allows for the development of parental skills while they are receiving medical services for addiction and or critical mental health issues. If we do not, we risk perpetuating damaging trauma in the next generation.

Please give your unanimous support to LD 246 Alternative Sentencing for Primary Caregivers.

Thank-you,  
Jan

Jan M. Collins  
*Assistant Director*  
*Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition*  
PO Box 360, E. Wilton, ME 04234  
207.578.8419

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<sup>1</sup>ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION- ***A SHARED SENTENCE*** <https://www.aecf.org/resources/a-shared-sentence>

<sup>2</sup>HECHINGER REPORT- Katy Reckdahl for ***THE NATION*** also *Televerde Foundation* <https://www.televerdefoundation.org/the-facts-about-intergenerational-incarceration/#:~:text=The%20children%20of%20incarcerated%20parents,the%20children%20of%20incarcerated%20parents>.