



Maine Sheriffs' Association

"One Team, One Mission"

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March 24, 2025

**TESTIMONY OF
SHERIFF JOEL MERRY
MAINE SHERIFFS ASSOCIATION**

**LD 405 – An Act To Define “Solitary Confinement” For The Laws
Governing Jails and Correctional Facilities**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee of Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is Sheriff Joel Merry. I am the Sheriff of Sagadahoc County and I am here on behalf of the Maine Sheriffs Association.

Your Maine Sheriffs have taken the unanimous position of **OPPOSITION** for LD 405 – An Act to Define “Solitary Confinement” For The Laws Governing Jails and Correctional Facilities.

The majority of individuals who become incarcerated in Maine’s jails arrive with mental health disorders, substance use disorders, and often both. Jails are tasked with stabilizing these individuals and helping them receive the services they require to overcome their crisis situations. We know these individuals can be volatile and dangerous not only to themselves, but to staff members, and other jail residents.

Hindering the ability to separate violent inmates from the general population is a critical tool to deter dangerous behavior. In 2022, New York adopted the HALT act, a misguided attempt to prohibit segregation of violent inmates from the general population for a select number of hours per day. Since its inception, New York has reported an 85% increase in the number of assaults on corrections staff in its first year. Also in that first year, seven inmates were killed due to increased violence. Ultimately, New York opted to suspend some of the provisions while revising the law to balance inmate and staff safety.

You may hear from former residents who share stories of being in solitary confinement in Maine facilities, not interacting with other people for days on end. These scenarios do not exist. If an individual incarcerated in a Maine jail is segregated for safety reasons, the correctional staff is required to check on them regularly, in many cases, every fifteen minutes.

Maine jails are chronically underfunded and understaffed. Maine jails do not keep residents away from the general population unless there is a danger to staff or others housed in the facility. By this bill’s definition, a resident would be released into general population for two hours each day. We have seen the devastation left by other states who have explored this same path. Maine sheriffs urge you to vote ought not to pass on L.D. 405. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.