



## TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

LD 1335 – Ought to Pass as Amended

### **An Act to Prohibit Life Sentences**

Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

March 31, 2025

PO Box 7860  
Portland, ME 04112

(207) 774-5444  
ACLUMaine.org  
@ACLUMaine

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, greetings. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am the policy director for the ACLU of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil rights and civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, we urge you to support LD 1335 because it would honor the dignity of those who have paid their debts to society, save considerable state resources, and give incarcerated people a better chance at growth and rehabilitation.

If enacted, LD 1335 would prohibit life sentences or sentences equivalent to life imprisonment after January 1, 2026.

Life in prison is, short of execution, the harshest imaginable punishment. It is permanent removal from society with no chance of reentry, no hope of freedom. It shuts off the chance to learn from past mistakes, repair harm done, and fully become a contributing member of society. Although Maine abolished the death penalty in 1887, our criminal code allows for the possibility of life without parole.<sup>1</sup> As of 2022, there were between 90 and 117 “individuals serving life or virtual life sentences in Maine.”<sup>2</sup> This bill would mitigate the cruelty of our criminal code to people who have paid their debts to society, and who no longer pose a danger to others.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, this bill would save the state money. According to the National Institute of Health, “older prisoners cost approximately three times as much

---

<sup>1</sup> See 17-A M.R.S. §§ 1602, 1603.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Besteman & Leo Hylton, *The Case for Second Chances: A Pathway to Decarceration in Maine*, 76 Me. L. Rev. 65, 71 n. 36 (2024), available at <https://digitalcommons.maine.law.maine.edu/mlr/vol76/iss1/4>.

<sup>3</sup> The likelihood of recidivism drops significantly over time. According to a 2021 Department of Justice study, the older someone is, the less likely they are to be arrested following release from prison. See *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 34 States in 2012: A 5-Year Follow-Up Period (2012–2017)*, U.S. Department of Justice, July 2021, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/rpr34s125yfup1217.pdf> (“Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 34 States in 2012: A 5-Year Follow-Up Period (2012–2017)”); see also, *The aging prison population: Causes, costs, and consequences*, Prison Policy Initiative, August 2, 2023, available at <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2023/08/02/aging/>.



as younger prisoners to incarcerate, largely due to healthcare costs.”<sup>4</sup> Although this bill would not have an impact on the sentences of people currently serving a life sentence, it would prevent another 90 to 117 people from being incarcerated at great cost to the state.

This bill will save the state money and honor the dignity of those who have spent a great deal of their lives in prison.

We urge you to vote *ought to pass*.

---

<sup>4</sup> Williams BA, Goodwin JS, Baillargeon J, Ahalt C, Walter LC. *Addressing the aging crisis in U.S. criminal justice health care*. J Am Geriatr Soc. 2012 Jun;60(6):1150-6. doi: 10.1111/j.1532-5415.2012.03962.x. Epub 2012 May 29. PMID: 22642489; PMCID: PMC3374923.