

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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Testimony in Support of LD 1366 to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

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Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, 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 on behalf of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition and our commitment to public safety and the health of our communities.

Back in the days of yesteryear, there was a national scare about “crack cocaine” and Congress, quickly followed by the Maine Legislature, enhanced the penalties for crack cocaine. This created a huge disparity between sentences for crack and powder cocaine.



The image presented by policymakers was of young black drug dealers lurking on inner-city, or “ghetto,” street corners pushing this inexpensive drug onto children and others. That’s what they were called: “pushers.”

Think back and see that image in your mind. It’s so pervasive I’ll bet you can see it even if it was before your time.

Why were those young men on that street corner?

NOT to sell crack to the local kids. They were there to sell cocaine **powder** to the white men driving in from the suburbs. Called “honkies” because they tooted their horns to get the attention of the vendors.

The local kids and adults couldn’t afford the powder so they were sold crack. The cheap stuff. So we increased the penalties for the locals and not for the users in the Woody Allen films. This bill seeks to take another step in remedying that historical injustice. We urge you to support it.

Thank you for your attention. I’ll be happy to try to answer any questions.

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