

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Committee on Judiciary.

My name is Representative Alicia Collins. I represent the towns of Sidney and Vassalboro.

I am here to testify in favor of LD 1650 – **An Act to Allow Paralegals to Be Paid by the Maine Commission on Public Defense Services.**

I will keep my testimony brief.

A constituent suggested LD 1650 to alleviate the court backlog by providing a support system of paralegals for attorneys representing indigent people.

On February 25th, ¹Chief Justice Stanfill spoke to a Joint Session of House and Senate. She talked of the challenges facing the courts in Maine today. One large problem is the availability of council for people who cannot afford council. She quoted a number from Maine Commission on Public Defense Services' (MCPDS) December report of 1,150 pending cases without representation: 998 criminal cases, 112 child protective cases and 40 cases in appeal.

The problem is so great that the ²ACLU stepped in on behalf of Andrew Robbins' to bring a class action case against the State of Maine, and the State's 6th Amendment violations.

"Many hands make light work." According to the Bible, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, ³recognized the burden to judge the people of Israel was too great for one man. Jethro suggested Moses distribute the work among trusted tribal leaders. Creating a pool of paralegals will help distribute the load attorneys carry, making the backlog manageable.

What if the system (MCPDS) that employs attorneys to those who can't afford them, could also provide qualified support for those attorneys to complete their work in an efficient manner? This bill is the answer.

¹ A Report to the Joint Convention of the First Regular Session of the 132nd Maine Legislature Presented by Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill

² <https://www.aclumaine.org/en/robbinsvmaine>

³ Exodus 18

The vision is for this pool is 1099 contract employees, who would be available “on call” when an attorney needs help with scheduling, making phone calls, research – it would allow the attorney to make the best use of their time: with the judge, with their client and (unfortunately) driving to their appointments.

It’s self-evident Maine has a problem with representation in criminal cases. This bill could help alleviate the strain on the system by offering additional resources through paralegals to minimize courts costs and free up qualified attorney’s time to take on other cases.

Thank you for your time today.

Alicia C. Collins

State Representative