



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep. Rafael Macias presenting

**LD 1693, An Act to Establish a Sustainable Housing Development Prison
Work Program**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Good afternoon, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is Rafael Macias, and I represent House District 51, which includes part of Topsham. Thank you for the opportunity to present **LD 1693, An Act to Establish a Sustainable Housing Development Prison Work Program**.

When I first imagined this idea, I heard The Spinners singing “Working My Way Back To You.” On my computer, the folder is named just that. In my heart, this bill is about forgiveness. In legislative reality, it is about building skills, building futures, and, quite literally, building the homes that Maine families desperately need.

We are facing two urgent challenges today:

1. A shortage of affordable housing
2. A corrections system that often releases individuals without the tools they need to succeed.

The Department of Corrections in Maine is working hard to make that not true. LD 1693 addresses both — with care, responsibility, and vision.

Under this program, incarcerated individuals, or “residents” in the Maine Model of Corrections, who qualify will have the opportunity to voluntarily learn construction skills, work toward trade certifications, and actively contribute to the public good by building energy-efficient housing.

The work is not arbitrary. It is purposeful.

It connects residents to community colleges, trades, and pathways to future employment.

This program is good because it transforms prison time from passive punishment into active rehabilitation.

It prepares people to leave stronger than they entered — skilled, employable, and capable of building a life beyond prison walls.

It's a good idea because it addresses our housing crisis head-on. The homes built through this program are not luxury developments. They are meant to serve Maine families struggling to find a foothold — young couples, working parents, and seniors. They are built sustainably, using local materials, ensuring that the work done today serves future generations.

It's a good idea because it's financially responsible. The cost of incarcerating one individual in Maine is roughly \$60,000 a year. Suppose a participant earns two or three years off their sentence through hard work and certification. In that case, the state saves \$120,000 to \$180,000 per individual — savings that can be reinvested into housing, education, healthcare, and strengthening our communities.

It's a good idea because it is humane. It gives people a chance—not a guarantee, but a chance—to redefine themselves through work, learning, and contribution.

It's a good idea because it aligns with our values. Mainers believe in hard work and second chances. We must all believe that justice is not only about consequences, but also about growth, restoration, and hope.

There are guardrails built into this bill:

- Participation is voluntary.
- Sentence reductions are capped at 25%.
- An oversight committee ensures transparency and accountability.

And the participants are not competing with free workers for commercial contracts.

They are serving the public good, filling a gap where the private market has fallen short.

In closing, LD 1693 is not just a good idea — it's a necessary one. It shows that Maine can lead with compassion without compromising safety. It shows that we can build opportunity even behind prison walls. It shows that we can meet the needs of our state by believing in the dignity of every person willing to work for a second chance, for forgiveness, and hopefully a home of their own.

I respectfully urge you to vote 'Ought to Pass' on LD 1693.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.