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LD 1725  
Luca Mellon  
4/28/2025

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Luca Mellon, I live in Rockland, and I urge you to vote **ought not to pass** on LD 1725.

Sheriff Polky appointed me to the Knox-Waldo joint BOV in October 2023. No one on our board had lived experience, so I focused my efforts on collecting feedback from the people locked up in our facilities. One reason I oppose this bill is because it makes it harder for the experts on incarceration – those who've survived it – to educate the rest of us on what would actually help.

Our board met several times to compare notes, review the legislation, and draft an annual report. The amount of work was taxing for the five of us, and would have been better distributed among seven members. If this bill passes, five will be the minimum number of members rather than seven.

When we met, we were careful to stick to the facts, knowing that we were responsible to answer to this committee regarding the content of our report. If this bill passes, that will no longer be true. Some boards will continue to uphold a high standard regardless, while others may not.

Some sheriffs engage well with their boards, and others do the bare minimum. As for us, our sheriff never sent us his response to our report. If this bill passes, sheriffs won't need to reply to the reports at all, which means they don't even need to read them. This bill will also make it so that the reports never have to leave the county. If Augusta holds copies, as you do now, it will be easier for this committee to discern patterns across facilities and address statewide jail issues as they come up.

Sheriff Polky disbanded our joint board last year, leaving me as the only member on Knox's BOV. He then removed me as well, with two years left on my term, citing my former employment with Maine Pretrial Services as disqualifying. The board he appointed to replace us includes his own sister.

Jail BOV's support better outcomes for everyone: inmates, their families, correctional staff, jail contractors, and administrators. When an inmate hung herself and died in Knox's custody last year, we couldn't be of service. We couldn't tour and report recommendations back to Sheriff Polky's office and your committee. The same was true when there were enough prison rape concerns that the Knox jail had to undergo a PREA audit last year. I bring these examples up to remind everyone listening how high the stakes are when it comes to incarceration. And I share my difficulties serving on this board to demonstrate how easy it already is for a sheriff to keep a willing board from performing their duties. This bill will make it even easier by obliterating the law's already minimal legislative oversight.

For some inmates, the BOV is the only neutral party tasked with bearing witness to the issues in their jail. And for some boards of visitors, this committee is the only recourse we have to hold sheriffs accountable to this law. 30-A §1651 in its current form is an important piece of legislation that allows knowledgeable community involvement in the carceral systems that lock up our loved ones, and it needs strengthening, not dismantling.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote **ought not to pass** on LD 1725.

Luca Mellon  
Rockland