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Testimony of Rep. Rafael Macias presenting

**LD 1749, Resolve, Directing the Department of Corrections to Study
Achieving Gender Equality**

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 1749, Resolve, Directing the Department of Corrections to Study Achieving Gender Equality**.

This bill asks for something simple but essential: a study to assess whether Maine's correctional system is meeting the needs of all incarcerated people — regardless of gender.

Today, our correctional facilities, policies, and programs are still largely built around an outdated model: a time when prisons housed mostly men, and the needs of women, transgender and gender-diverse individuals were barely considered.

Yet over the past decade, Maine has seen a sharp rise in female incarceration and, with it, a growing body of evidence that women experience prison differently — and, too often, unfairly.

We know nationally that incarcerated women report far higher rates of mental illness and trauma. They are more likely to be primary caregivers. Their healthcare needs, including reproductive health and pregnancy support, are often unmet.

They face greater hurdles upon release — securing housing and jobs and rebuilding family bonds.

Despite these known realities, Maine has not conducted a comprehensive review to determine whether our system is responding appropriately.

LD 1749 gives us the opportunity to gather the facts, identify the gaps, and act responsibly — not based on assumptions, but on data and truth.

But beyond the policy and the statistics, there's a deeper principle at stake.

Behind every number is a human being — a mother trying to hold onto her child's trust from behind a glass window. A young woman struggling to heal from trauma without access to proper counseling. A transgender person housed unsafely, unseen by a system that never designed a place for them.

Justice isn't static. It demands that we look again, listen, and adapt when the people we serve change.

When we say that every person deserves fairness and dignity, we must mean every person, even those we have incarcerated.

Passing LD 1749 is a first step toward living up to that promise. It is a step toward a corrections system that doesn't simply punish but prepares people to return to our communities stronger, healthier, and more whole.

I urge you to vote 'ought to pass' on LD 1749. Let us be the state that does not turn away when asked to do better. Let us be the state that says: "Every person matters" and then acts like it.

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