

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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January 7, 2026

Senator Beebe Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Jan Collins, I am Assistant Director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC) an organization committed to ethical, positive, and humane changes in Maine's prison system. I am speaking in support of LD 1962 An Act to Establish the Corrections Ombuds.

MPAC often receives requests for assistance from people in prisons across the state. The requests are made after individuals have exhausted all avenues allowed them within their place of confinement according to policy. Most of the requests revolve around lack of medical care.

Just a few examples include-

Teeth that have become infected while medical care has been denied, the pain becoming so intense, individuals have resorted to pulling their own teeth.

An individual whose bicep tendon had detached and was bunched in the crook of his arm...he waited over six months for an MRI recommended by medical staff.

A man who had lost the use of his legs and has been wheelchair bound for years had his foot rest taken by medical (ostensibly for repairs). Months later, it had not been returned. With no footrest, his dragging foot was caught under his wheelchair, flipping him forward, sustaining injuries to his face and hands. He waited several more months before he was able to get his footrest back.

Other nonmedical examples include-

An HVAC system that does not provide adequate heat on the coldest days of the year and does not provide cooling in some buildings in the summer;

A mailroom that holds mail for weeks;

A grievance system that dismisses grievances not based on the validity of a grievance, but on whether or not the complainant stays within the lines.

These people are looking for help. They have tried to work within the system and have been unsuccessful. In desperation, they turn to us. You have to be desperate to turn to an organization that has no power. We listen, we bring their requests to the DOC's attention. But, that is the extent of what we can do. Sometimes it helps. Often it does not.

This governor and previous governors have declined to appoint members to the prisons' Boards of Visitors. Some boards sit empty. Others boards meet but never enter the buildings to talk to residents. Years go by and annual reports required by law are not submitted.

People who find themselves in DOC custody often feel that they have been disappeared. The walls are high; we cannot see through them; the public cannot enter; media have difficulty getting access to information; most people have no idea what goes on inside.

The question is not whether an independent Ombuds office is needed for the Department of Corrections. The testimony you have heard here today provides overwhelming evidence of the need. The question is whether or not people who are incarcerated deserve to be treated with humanity.

I hope your answer will be yes. Please give your full support to LD 1926.

Thank-you,

Jan

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