



Jill C. Duson
Senator, District 27
Assistant Majority Leader

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

*Testimony of Senate Assistant Majority Leader Jill C. Duson presenting
LD 1962, An Act to Establish the Corrections Ombudsman
Before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
January 7, 2026*

Good afternoon, Chair Beebe-Center, Chair Hasenfus and honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Jill Duson. I serve as the Senate Assistant Majority Leader and have the privilege of representing Senate District 27, which includes part of Westbrook and part of Portland. Thank you for the opportunity to present LD 1962, An Act to Establish the Corrections Ombudsman.

This bill proposes to establish an Office of the Corrections Ombudsman. Having served as the Long Term Care Ombudsman for the State of Maine, I have a particular affinity for the role of an Ombudsman to act as a neutral, independent check on public institutions and systems; to investigate complaints and mediate disputes; and, to ensure fairness, accountability, and transparency and recommend systemic improvements in the administration of public programs.

The focused intent of the Office proposed by this legislation is to perform trend analyses of institutional practices and services administered through the Department of Corrections, and recommend changes in policies, procedures, and practices to achieve continuous improvement in systems outcomes.

Unlike the Maine DOC Board of Visitors, the Corrections Ombudsman office would be charged with receiving and investigating concerns submitted confidentially by staff, residents or the general public.

Through LD 1962, Maine has an opportunity to join 19 other states, which, according to the nonpartisan National Conference of State Legislatures, have a prison oversight body that meets eight key requirements, including full independence from the correctional agency they oversee, having the formal or informal right to access correctional facilities and are set up as a permanent body.



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Now, you might wonder, doesn't Maine already have some structure for oversight of our state corrections system? We do, but as a taxpayer, I'm concerned that a considerable amount of our public monies are being spent not in rehabilitation services for the incarcerated or for corrections employee support, but instead to settle suits initiated by incarcerated people or their families following release, with a view to compensating them for experiences suffered during incarceration. These settlements have run into the millions.

An independent assessment of how things are being done could lead to new and better approaches. Independent assessments can be particularly useful in improving care of dependent populations.

I also want to acknowledge that our own Department of Corrections is known nationally as one of the best in the country. But being known as "one of the best" is not a good reason for not furthering our mission of oversight, and this proposal provides us the opportunity to build on the good work already being done. Because we have a good Department of Corrections, we anticipate rapid proactive improvements through the work of the Ombudsman office.

It is extremely rare for anything to improve solely as a result of self-examination, whether an individual, a system or a government. Improvement almost always occurs in the setting of independent evaluation followed up with recommendations. I believe as a former Ombudsman myself, I have a deep understanding of this unique relationship.

In Maine we pride ourselves on transparency, taking the view that taxpayers are best served by knowing how their dollars are spent and welcoming public/consumer input to provide guidance and ideas to the state for improvements. As stated previously, the Maine Department of Corrections remains the only Department in state government without that benefit.

An incredible group of advocates will speak in depth on why this new approach is needed. They will touch on various challenges that mark our current approach to incarceration in Maine and how a Corrections Ombudsman Office can identify improvements that will make things better for staff, for residents and for the Maine taxpayer.



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Thank you for your attention to this bill, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Jill C. Duson, with the initials "SD27" written below it.

Jill C. Duson
Senate Assistant Majority Leader
District 27