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TESTIMONY OF

**JILL O'BRIEN, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
MAINE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**

February 9, 2025

In Support of:

LD 2157, An Act to Prohibit the Unauthorized Use of Drones on or Over the Premises of Correctional Facilities and Jails

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Jill O'Brien, and I am the Director of Government Affairs for the Maine Department of Corrections.

I am testifying in support of LD 2157, An Act to Prohibit the Unauthorized Use of Drones on or Over the Premises of Correctional Facilities and Jails. This is a Department of Corrections bill that makes it a Class C crime to pilot a drone over the premises of a correctional facility without permission from the chief administrative officer. The bill also clarifies that it is a Class C crime to use a drone to convey or attempt to convey prison contraband.

A bill prohibiting drones over correctional facilities is necessary to combat a growing nationwide problem of drones being used to convey contraband like cell phones, drugs, and escape tools. Drones are also used to survey prison staff and security features to plan escapes.

In 2025, Georgia's Corrections Department detected nearly 400 drones attempting to bring contraband into its facilities. In December of last year, a drone in South Carolina dropped marijuana, cigarettes, and food into a South Carolina prison. A different drone in South Carolina dropped escape tools prior to that incident.

Contraband is not just a rules issue, it is a safety issue. Prison residents can use cell phones to contact victims and coordinate criminal activity. Substance use in Maine's prisons remains a danger to residents and staff, with a dozen residents and several staff last year requiring emergency room care after exposure to contraband substances. While Maine does not know how those particular substances were brought into the prison, drones are frequently used to bring drugs into prisons.

Presently, nothing prohibits flying a drone over a prison or jail in Maine, even though it is prohibited to fly one in Baxter State Park. Park Rule 5.5 imposes a \$1000 civil penalty for flying an unmanned aerial vehicle in the park.

New Hampshire passed a law outlawing the use of drones over correctional facilities that went into effect on January 1. Tennessee and Arkansas have also recently passed similar laws.

This is a real problem facing not just other states but Maine too. Recently, multiple drones were detected over Long Creek and the Cumberland County Jail, and more than a dozen drones per day were detected over the Portland International Jetport, very close to Long Creek.

The federal Bureau of Prisons detected 57 drones over its 122 facilities in 2019, which was double the previous year's drone count.

To stop the dangerous practice of flying drones over correctional facilities, the Department urges you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2157. I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

Jill O'Brien
Director of Government Affairs, Maine Department of Corrections