

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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Testimony Neither For nor Against LD 13, to the Joint Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety February 10, 2021

Senator Deschambault, Rep. Warren and distinguished members of the Committee.

My name is Peter Lehman. I live in Thomaston and I represent the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. LD 13 involves the **first day** for a new resident.

As a formerly incarcerated citizen, I want to talk with you about how important this first day is for the new resident from a financial and human perspective. It is an **opportunity** we must not waste.

Intake is an opportunity to change the tone and perspective of the entire incarceration of the new resident. It is also an opportunity to begin the process of successful reentry into our communities. Successful reentry begins on day one. And this is it.

At the least, it requires coordinated transport and careful planning so that the opportunity isn't wasted.

The new resident is going to spend time incarcerated. The **question is whether they will take advantage of it**—whether this will be an **opportunity to grow and change**. An opportunity to make it less likely that they will come back.

Overall, the more the new resident feels valued and listened to and respected, the more likely they will be to engage and find their opportunity. The more likely they will be to succeed.

The more they feel like a shipped package and the more they feel disrespected the more likely they will be a problem resident and the less likely they will be successful.

* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.

I have seen the tragedy of men who return, stuck on the merry-go-round. They create more victims and cost us a fortune incarcerating them again. This is about saving money as well as saving lives. And that first day is critical.

We believe that the new resident should be received by excellent staff who listen to them, in as low stress environment as possible. Staff who are sensitive to the trauma of this moment and who work with the new resident in a positive and welcoming manner.

We also believe that this crucial transition moment would be enhanced by involving peer support residents to assist with the transition. That would be possible at both MCC and MSP where most intakes occur and which also have a strong network of peer support residents.

Although it's not the same thing as that first intake, orientation at the Bolduc facility recognizes that this is a stressful situation as well as an opportunity by including residents working with the newcomers and helping to orient them. And it works. It's an example we hope the DOC implements more broadly.

Again, this requires coordinated transport and careful planning so that the opportunity isn't wasted.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have by email or at your work session.