

February 24, 2021

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



Greetings Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and Honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee.

My name is Jan Collins. I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. I am here to support LD 417 An Act to Protect Maine Driver's from Pretextual Stops. MPAC's mission is to support Maine's incarcerated citizens, their families, and friends in their struggle with Maine's criminal justice system. Our purpose is to reduce Maine's use of incarceration by creating a criminal justice system that is ethical, humane, and restorative in nature.

There are people in Maine who are targeted because of their appearance.

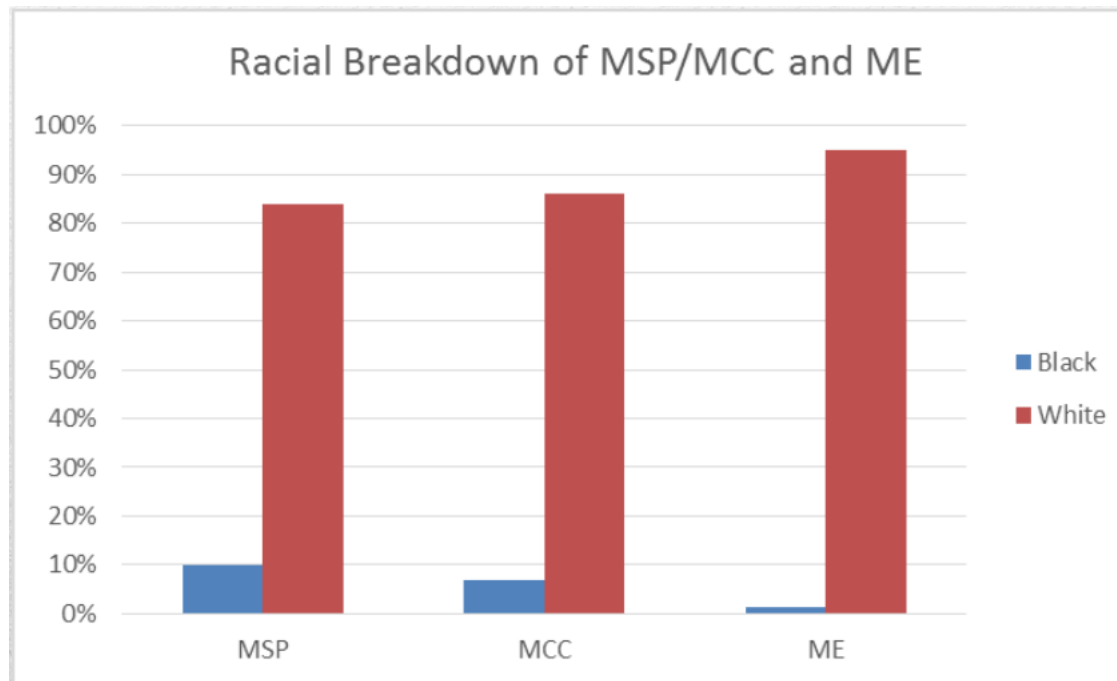
A few years back, I met a friend at an art museum in Portland to spend the afternoon in the big city getting some culture. In the gallery we moved from room to room, sometimes halting to look more closely or comment on a particularly striking piece. At one point a guard asked us to step back from a painting as he felt we were too close. We apologized and moved on. As we entered the next room, the guard also appeared in that room. I thought perhaps he was giving that room's guard a break, but when we moved to the next room he appeared there as well, and the same in each subsequent room. It became obvious that we were being watched.

When we exited the building, I turned to my friend and commented that I felt like we were being followed. That had never happened to me before, had it happened to him? His answer was striking, "Yes it happens all the time."

That was my first experience with profiling. I have been in many museums since then and have even been admonished not to stand too close to a painting. But I never again had a guard follow me from room to room.

My experience was unpleasant and uncomfortable, but it had no lasting consequence for me. We know however that is not true for people of color. This bill is important because it insures that everyone is treated fairly, that you cannot be targeted because of the make of your car, the color of your skin or the way you wear your hair.

The Maine Statistical Center released reports on [Juvenile Disproportionate Minority Contact](#) in 2010, 2011, 2012, and [2015](#). The data shows that at every step of the criminal justice system - policing, arrests, detentions and commitments - minorities are disproportionately affected.



Graph
from
January
2016
lecture

by Christopher Petrella & Michael Rocque,
Bates College

The 2019 [Justice Reinvestment Report](#) indicates a pattern of institutional racism in the criminal justice system in Maine. Although the adult system in Maine has not been studied with the same detail as youth, the results can be extrapolated, as seen in the graph above indicating the racial disparities in Maine's two largest prisons as compared to the state's general population.

Traffic stops are just one way that minority communities are targeted. Although blacks and whites use drugs similar proportions, blacks are seven times more likely to be arrested for drug offenses. Over policing of minority populations has lasting and negative effects on families, children and communities.

Please support LD 417 An Act to Protect Maine Driver's from Pretextual Stops.

Thank you,
Jan M. Collins
Assistant Director
Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition