

Cheryl Mills
Wells

"Senator Deschambault, Representatives Warren, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,
I am writing in support of LD 476 An Act To Provide Licensed Assisted Living and Nursing Facilities Levels of Care for Incarcerated Persons."

I have the privilege of visiting monthly with women at the Women's Center at the Maine Correctional Center. During those visits the women residents share their successes and the challenges they face living in a MEDOC facility. One of the women died last Saturday, January 8, 2022 at MCC following several months of end of life health.

My appreciation is extended to the administration of the Women's Center for allowing the resident's sister to spend considerable time with her during her last months. I was also deeply moved by the love expressed and care given to her by her fellow residents and some of the staff.

I was told that the resident's wish, I will refer to her as R, was to die in the facility with those who cared about her, who had in effect become family. In December when I was inside she was being cared for in what I believe is the sick bay, near the kiosk where the officers are stationed. However, for the last week of her life the resident was moved back to her walk. It was reported to me by the women who were helping care for her that the room she was moved to was filthy and they cleaned it themselves before R was moved in. A small group of residents divided into shifts and stayed with her around the clock after that. They reported that she was often not given her medications, was not turned and was left soiled and that staff exhibited less than compassionate care.

Having accompanied both my father, many years ago, and mother in law, this past year, during their end of life times I know how important it is to have adequate, consistent and timely professional medical care and the comfort and advocacy of family, whether biological or of the heart. R was fortunate to have the latter but it seems not the former.

Regardless of what actions brought someone to be residing in a MEDOC facility, humane care is their right and the DOC's responsibility. It is my position that residents of Maine's DOC facilities have adequate, consistent and timely professional medical care at all times. I support LD 476 so that it is guaranteed at the end of their life. Licensing is crucial to ensuring that they do. No business or agency can be allowed to hold itself responsible for self-oversight. State licensing standards are the minimal that should be adhered to for any resident of the state of Maine, inside or outside of the DOC. If a prison cannot offer a licensed facility for nursing home or end of life care then that care must be provided for outside in the community. At this point the resident of a DOC prison is no longer any threat to anyone else and care should be provided on the outside.

As Mahatma Ghandi said "the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." Individuals needing nursing home and/or end of life care certainly are some of our most vulnerable. May the state of Maine not be found wanting in this measurement.