

Testimony in Support of LD 1175
Presented by Cushman Anthony
On behalf of the Maine Council of Churches
April 14, 2021

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety: My name is Cushman Anthony. I am a Quaker and I live in Yarmouth. I am a retired lawyer and mediator. I was a member of the House of Representatives from 1986 to 1992, and was House Chair of the Select Committee on Corrections during the 115th Legislature.

I am speaking today on behalf of the Maine Council of Churches, the leading organization of Protestant Christian churches in our state. We represent seven denominations statewide which include 437 churches with a total membership of more than 55,000 members. Our Prayer for Justice states that we are working toward "...a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love."

We support passage of LD 1175 to prohibit excessive telephone, video and commissary charges in Maine jails and prisons.

County jails as well as state correctional facilities currently maintain fee structures under which the institution makes a profit on every call made by prisoners. That seems to us as unjust. It is a form of price gouging of people who have few resources. If our prisons and jails need added funding, then they should seek additional appropriations to run the institutions and their programs.

It is also counterproductive. Maintaining contact between prisoners and their loved ones helps motivate prisoners to engage in educational and other programs. Those who do so are far more likely to succeed after they are released and thus avoid recidivating. Even more important, having frequent contact between a prisoner and his or her family is crucial for maintaining the wellbeing and good conduct of the children in those families.

People who have been incarcerated are due fair treatment. The Bible directs us to look after those who have been put into prisons and jails. We need to support those people and help them make contact with their families rather than tax them for doing so. We should be ashamed of the current policies of overcharging for these services.

Maine can do far better.