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Rep. Warren testimony to LD 1175, “An Act To Prohibit Excessive Telephone, Video and Commissary Charges in Maine Jails and Prison”

Presented by Representative Sophia B. Warren, House District 29. Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 2021.

Dear Senator Desambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Sophie Warren. I am a Scarborough resident and State Representative for House District 29.

I write today to testify in favor of LD 1175.

I believe our pricing should be uniform, fair and appropriate to facilitate rehabilitation for incarcerated populations and decrease recidivism.

By tasking the department to negotiate contracts for services at the lowest cost to the client, removing a connection fee, and setting a uniform rate, we set a standard that allow equality under the law.

In Sheriff Bill King’s own testimony, he admits current fees are not uniform, “The cost of a telephone call varies from jail to jail and from a recent unofficial survey, we found that only two jails have a “connection fee” of \$1.30 per call.”

As a legislature, it is our responsibility to ensure we protect the rights of all those within the care of the state. Additionally, I think we have a duty of care to ensure these systems do not trap people within

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them, but rather facilitate contributing co-equal members of our communities with evidence-based strategies that lead to less crime, violence and incarceration.

Increasing social connection, systems of support and community care is one clear, well-studied way of doing this. Here, we put a tax on poverty and act as a barrier in the way of that support.

It seems valuable to have tablets in our incarceration institutions. However, it seems a false choice to say we choose between one or the other, though I defer to a reality I recognize — that the political choices we make here are not going to change overnight, but represent a much broader arc towards justice that I hold this bill is one small push in the direction of.

I uphold the work of the Maine Recovery Advocacy Project, Policy Director Courtney Allen, and the young Mainer who Director Allen so movingly credits as helping to bring this common sense legislation forward — her son, Wyatt. As legislators, I believe we are duty bound to listen to our youth and the new perspective they can bring to this legislative body. They allow us opportunities to see things in a new light. I hope we can do that here.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony as you prepare for your work session.

I ask your committee to vote “ought to pass”.

Sincerely,
Sophie Warren

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