

## Boston and Bo's Stories

No Penobscot County Jail Expansion is a community group in Penobscot County. We began **The Penobscot County Jail Storytelling Project** as the start of a community conversation on how we can heal our communities with truth, justice, and care—not more jailing, arrests, and criminalization.



*Boston's portrait was painted by artist Teresa Lagrange.*

We offer this testimony from our interviews with community members, in **support of LD 663** - An Act To Make Comprehensive Substance Use Disorder Treatment Available to Maine's Incarcerated Population.

Bo and Boston spoke to one of our interviews together, and their testimony highlights how prioritizing punishment over rehabilitation and care creates a vicious cycle for people incarcerated in Penobscot County Jail, especially when combined with factors like mental health and poverty.

Their story also demonstrates the importance of listening to individuals who understand most these cycles and who are best able to identify solutions.

Thank you for reading, and thank you for caring about our incarcerated family. With your help, we are making a difference.

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The community members we interview frequently describe **not having access to their prescribed Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for substance use disorders while in jail**. Even at jails where MAT is supposedly available, this situation is extremely common, and the impact is severe. While talking about conditions under COVID quarantine in PCJ, Boston described how an already inhumane situation was exacerbated for those suffering from substance use disorder:

“Never mind if you’re coming off drugs! I’ve done that plenty of times. Like, this time I went in [to PCJ], they just decided, “We’re not giving you Suboxone.” I mean, they really f\*\*\* with you. I’ve had a prescription for years, and they know that. This time I went in, they just— and there’s nothing you could do. There is nothing you could do.”

Critically, LD 663 establishes MAT programs which can begin new treatment programs, allowing people who have been incarcerated to begin putting their lives back on track. Additionally, this proactive approach helps to protect newly released people from overdosing on drugs due to a loss of tolerance.

Bo shared, “I really believe if—even if you don't have a prescription on the street, and you're seeking Suboxone help when you get into County [Jail], you're already staying healthy. ..So why not give him the medication, put him on it, and get him started.

“So at least they're not coming out and taking a big shot and dying! ... **I've had countless friends that have gotten out of that jail and O.D.'d and died.**”

Bo and Boston also talked about potential solutions, with Bo citing an ex-partner's experience working in the Quebec system in Canada. “Instead of putting you in jail, they try to work with you.”

“There, you got addiction with heroin, well, either they give you heroin or they'll give you the pills—I can't remember the name of the medication. But they give you the stuff so you're not buying bad dope, so you're not injecting it. And they got injection sites and stuff, where you can go inject. So it's very proactive up there.”

Boston agreed: When asked where funds would be allocated more effectively than police cruisers or arrests, he said, “I'd just like to see, like you said, people not be going to jail to begin with. Not necessarily for certain crimes. But like you were saying, they're doing shit differently in Canada, like they want to rehabilitate, not f\*\*\*\*\* punish.” [...] There should be programs and s\*\*\* for certain crimes. You should do certain things for certain crimes. It should be more like you going and taking some course or something, and not doing what you did.

And figure out *why* it is that you did what you did, because there's deeper reasons than just say an addiction, and you robbed somebody to get something for your addiction. Well, why were you doing the drugs in the first place? What was bothering you so bad that you were doing the drugs? You know, you get into stuff like that, you're doing something to fix yourself.”

Bo and Boston's interview makes it clear that **the system's failure to assist and care for incarcerated people people dealing with substance use disorders** and contributing factors like trauma, mental illness, homelessness, and poverty, only serves to exacerbate all of these issues.

Continued criminalization of drugs and mental health issues will not solve Maine's overdose epidemic, and only swells an already marginalized population of incarcerated community members. We cannot continue to fail these people, who deserve care and assistance, and are best placed to address and advise on these issues.

Instead, we must move to a treatment-focused approach, which LD 663 would begin to establish.



*Bo's portrait by artist Teresa Lagrange.*