Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition

Peter M. Lehman, PhD
20 Lawrence Ave.
Thomaston, Maine 04861
(207) 542-1496
Peter@GrowInME.com

Testimony in Support of LD 1593
to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
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Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and distinguished members of the Committees.

My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen and a person in long-term recovery.* I am testifying on behalf of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition whose goal is to promote restorative practices in order to increase public safety and the health of our community.

As you know, the Supervised Community Confinement Program, or SCCP, was created by the legislature in 1991 to "save money, reduce prison overcrowding, and help minimum-security inmates find employment and transition back into mainstream life." The program has been very modest. In 2018 only 4.8% of releases were to SCCP.[1]

You on this Committee are acutely aware that almost all residents of our corrections institutions are released into our communities. You are also acutely aware of the enormous **costs of unsuccessful reentry**: recidivism creates more victims and costs us money.

SCCP can address some of the issues that create recidivism. This bill strengthens its effectiveness in doing this.

Most directly, SCCP can be an important "halfway house" experience for those reentering the community—combining

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[1] This has modestly increased in the past year, partly due to the pandemic.

* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.

structure with important supports. Some jurisdictions, including the Federal prison system, routinely include pre-release community confinement and/or halfway houses.

The existence of SCCP should also be a strong incentive for incarcerated women and men to pursue programs that increase their social and emotional capital for a successful reentry while they are incarcerated.

So why hasn't that worked?

1. **Cynicism** about the program. Many, if not most, residents don't think that they have a fair shot at SCCP and that it is a rigged program. Overall, this is probably the most difficult and consequential barrier because if effects behavior throughout incarceration.

2. **Lack of a place to go**. Residents with a place to live with family or with their own resources such as a home are typically the only ones with a good chance to be approved. Note that this means that the residents who are least at risk of recidivism get SCCP.

3. **Lack of advice and guidance** early in their incarceration about how to getting SCCP means that residents often reach that point in their incarceration without the additional social and emotional capital that would help get SCCP and to succeed.

In short, SCCP hasn't worked for those for whom it would be most beneficial—those at greatest risk of costing us new victims and lots of money when they reoffend.

This bill cleverly addresses all three of these issues.

1. **Creating legitimacy and trust**. The explicit criteria, the transparency and the oversight board in this bill are really aimed at instilling confidence, legitimacy and support for the program among residents. Without these components SCCP will continue to miss those who we most want it to work for.

2. This bill, along with current Department initiatives, substantially **expands the housing options** available for SCCP so that a resident can have more confidence that if they do everything else right, a place for them to go will be located.

3. This bill calls for early support and guidance for residents beginning early in their incarceration, helping and encouraging their investment in increasing social and emotional capital. Hopefully this will make SCCP a viable and motivating goal.

The result, we all fervently hope, will be another successful component in the on-going quest to improve successful reentry and decrease recidivism.

We strongly urge you to vote Ought to Pass.

Thank you for your attention and support.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.