



MAINE ASSOCIATION OF CRIMINAL DEFENSE LAWYERS

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Senator Susan Deschambault
Representative Charlotte Warren
Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety
100 State House Station, Rm. 436
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: MACDL Testimony in Support of LD 1588: Resolve, To Convene a Working Group To Identify and Find Replacements for Certain Stigmatizing References throughout the Maine Revised Statutes and Government Publications

Dear Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety,

MACDL supports LD 1588. Thank you to Representative Pluecker for bringing forth this important bill.

Words matter. Language matters. The words we choose and the language we use signals to the world at large the things and people we value—and those that we don't.

When we are not called mad dogs, animals, predators, offenders and other derogatory terms, we are referred to as inmates, convicts, prisoners and felons—all terms devoid of humanness which identify us as “things” rather than as people. These terms are accepted as the “official” language of the media, law enforcement, prison industrial complex and public policy agencies. However, they are no longer acceptable for us. ...We are asking everyone to stop using these negative terms and to simply refer to us as PEOPLE. PEOPLE currently or formerly incarcerated, PEOPLE on parole, PEOPLE recently released from prison, PEOPLE in prison, PEOPLE with criminal convictions, but PEOPLE. — Eddie Ellis, [“An Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language.”](#)

A wholesale examination of our laws and rules and policies to see what kind of language we are using to describe people who are ensnared in our criminal legal system would be an important and humanizing endeavor.

[The Marshall Project](#) has undertaken a project to re-humanize language in reporting on criminal legal issues, such as removing the use of the word “inmate”, and it is a worthy undertaking that Maine lawmakers and journalists (who I have been pushing behind the scenes and publicly) would do well to emulate. MACDL would be happy to assist any working group on this issue to ensure that Maine's values are reflected in the language of our laws.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for allowing me to speak with you all today on this important issue. I would be happy to answer the questions of the Committee.

With appreciation,



Tina Heather Nadeau, Esq.
MACDL Executive Director

The Marshall Project (April 2021):

[What Words We Use—and Avoid—When Covering People and Incarceration](#)

[Good Intentions Don't Blunt the Impact of Dehumanizing Words](#)

[I Am Not Your 'Inmate'](#)

[I Was Trained to Call Men By a Word They Hated](#)

[People-First Language Matters. So Does the Rest of the Story.](#)

[How I Convinced My Incarcerated Peers to Make Language a Priority](#)