



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1315

William D. Pluecker

State Representative
1133 Finntown Road
Warren, ME 04864
(207) 273-3044

Bill.Pluecker@legislature.maine.gov

Testimony introducing 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”

Presented by Representative Bill Pluecker, House District 95. Presented to the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee, Friday, May 14th, 2021.

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and other distinguished members of the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee. I am Representative Bill Pluecker and I represent House District 95 which is Appleton, Hope, part of the town of Union, and Warren. Thank you for the chance to present 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”.

The work of this bill has already been begun within the Department of Corrections as they have gone through their rules looking for stigmatizing terms that could be changed to “person first” language. The core of the idea is that a person should not be defined by the challenges they face, and we, as a government, should be making it clear in our use of the language that they are people who face these challenges. When people know they are seen as people by the government and the language the government uses, it can help to shift one’s own self-perception. My greatest challenges do not define me. I am a person who faces challenges and overcomes them.

The bill requires the Department of Corrections to convene a working group that includes people from DOC, DPS, DHHS, and DACF as well as a person with a lived experience of being labeled by one of the terms they are looking to change. They will create a list of where the terms arise in statute, rule and other government documents and publications, that need to be changed, and they will then report that list back to this committee in 2022. We can then introduce legislation to correct the statute.

The terms listed in the bill are: "convict," "offender," "inmate," "prisoner" and "drug user;" however, I would like to offer a small amendment to the bill that, if the workgroup, in the course of its work, finds other terms that they would like to address, I would like to authorize them to do so, and include them in their report back to this committee. This sort of review of language use is evolving and there may be other terms that need to be addressed, or others that just create more problems to address than they heal.

Thank you to the committee for supporting this work and furthering the work which has already been begun within the DOC. It may seem a small thing to those who have not faced these labels in their lives, but for those living with this stigma, this can be a significant step towards seeing oneself in a new light and beginning the crucial work of recovery.