

To the Committee Members,

Good Afternoon. The COVID-19 Hazardous Duty Pay was instrumental in retention of staff during the continued state of emergency. In corrections we have a tremendous turnover rate and officer fatigue. This would have been exacerbated by the conditions of the pandemic if it were not for the Hazardous Duty Pay. I do not have the figures of the amount of sick time used by individuals or the use of vacation time used by staff during the time we received the stipend. I have 14 years of experience and it is my understanding that staff had forgone vacations and not use sick time unless it was absolutely necessary. Many of the other state agencies were able to work remotely and not placing their families at risk of exposure to the virus. Staff at the Maine State Prison also were asked to carry additional duties associated with the pandemic such as video visitation. One notable additional duty was for some of the staff members, was to set up and run a day care facility for staff members who had no way to watch their children due to the closure of public day cares throughout the state. When not at the day care those individuals also fulfilled the requirements of their jobs providing instruction or programs to the residents at the facilities. College classes for the residents were also continued utilizing staff that were not educators by using video conferencing to ensure the completion of the college classes. Many of these staff members also hold duties such as case managers, the chaplain, and other program staff. They had to also continued with their assigned tasks as well as helping with the college program.

The Marshall Project (a non-profit journal for criminal justice) supplied numbers of COVID cases per state and the state of Maine was leading the rest of the country in prevention and number of the least amount of confirmed COVID cases this includes the Bureau of Prisons as part of the data (total of 51). This is in part because of our staff daily screenings and precautions using such things such as N-95 masks. A closer look at the rest of New England and our neighboring states of New Hampshire and Massachusetts rank 50 and 34 respectively. Potentially prisons and other correctional facilities place individuals at a higher risk of exposure to the virus, along with the easy transference from person to person due to the close proximity that residents and staff have to work in. According to an article written by researchers at University of California San Francisco, "Incarcerated people are five times more likely than the general public to get infected with the virus, and at least 1,200 residents and 70 staff members of jails and prisons across the country have died from complications of COVID-19." In the state we have had only one individual die from COVID-19 while being incarcerated, while the nation as a whole has had 2,670 residents die while incarcerated. The reason Maine ranks one of the lowest in cases and deaths from COVID is the extra precautions that staff had to utilize to ensure the protection of the residents and other staff members.

This should not be all about the staff members use of sick time or unused vacations. During the pandemic staff have provided the residents with a safe environment and maintained the residents' quality of life. Staff could have easily used their sick time and diminished the quality of life for the residents of the facility. This was in part because of the professionalism of the staff and the added stipend that was received up until December 31<sup>st</sup> of 2020.

Respectfully Jason Palmer Correctional Care and Treatment Worker MSP

