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LD 696

Senator Susan Deschambault, Representative Charlotte Warren and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

As a Maine citizen who has worked my entire life in the human services and mental health field with an interest in social justice, I am writing to you to express my support of LD 696 An Act to Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine. I believe this bill will help to update and improve the regulations around solitary confinement in Maine. I believe that without this improvement to the regulations that solitary confinement in the correctional system can be costly to taxpayers, lead to unintended outcomes including unsafe conditions in our prisons and communities, and may exacerbate the very issues that it intends to solve including violent and unpredictable behaviors by inmates both within the prison and upon release to the community. The results of solitary confinement has been well documented in recent articles by the Prison Policy Initiative, the Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, the Southern Poverty Law Center, Medical News Today and the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. These articles outline the many detriments to the system and to those incarcerated that are the result of solitary confinement. They include the fact that solitary confinement happens disproportionately more often to black and brown persons and those with mental illness. That the practice causes severe and irreparable psychological damage and personality changes to incarcerated individuals, causing them to become more antisocial, impulsive, disruptive and aggressive, the very behaviors that the practice is meant to decrease; that it causes medical health problems and premature death. That the practice is inefficient and is more costly than mainstream incarceration. And that it increases the likelihood of recidivism. Prolonged isolation from other persons has also been shown to increase the risk of death by suicide, homicide and opioid overdose. Further, the United Nation's Mandela rules, which much of the world has adopted, limits the use of solitary confinement and likens lengthy confinement to cruel and inhumane treatment, a form of torture. It is for all of these reasons that I fully support the adoption of LD 696 to further regulate this practice in our correctional system.