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**Testimony in Support of LD 696
to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
February 9, 2022**

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.

This is an exciting and positive bill that promotes safety, will reduce disciplinary problems and provides pathways for some of our most difficult residents to reenter general population at the prison and ultimately to reenter our communities. It not only eliminates practices that everyone including the DOC agree have no place in Maine, but it establishes new, better, safer and cheaper practices.

The key to LD 696 is the establishment of the Residential Rehabilitation Unit or RRU. This is a "separate housing unit for the purpose of therapy, treatment and rehabilitative programming to address a resident's individual treatment and rehabilitation needs and the underlying causes of the person's problematic behavior."

Units like this one have been shown to dramatically reduce violence and disciplinary problems.

It is a false assumption that somehow Segregated or Restricted confinement increases safety for staff and other residents. This is not the case. Not only is it extremely expensive but it [increases](#)

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

behavioral problems. Mostly this is because such behavior is expressive rather than instrumental.

Of course, it is certainly effective to briefly isolate residents who are acting out. This is a “time out,” familiar to parents—time to cool down and gather their wits. But that process is measured in hours, not days.

After that brief time out, the research is clear that segregation perpetuates and increases violence and problematic behaviors. This makes sense: **It exacerbates the existing issues rather than resolving them.**

In contrast, the RRU will dramatically reduce these negative outcomes.

The proposed RRU is modeled after the one established last year in New York state to replace solitary and other segregated or restricted confinement. Similar efforts have taken place in Colorado, South Carolina, Virginia and elsewhere.

In South Carolina, Therapeutic Diversion Units or TDUs are used to replace segregated or restricted confinement. Very recent research on 3,480 residents, of whom 463 were in a TDU, found that the TDUs dramatically reduce disciplinary issues, violence and self-harm. “Compared with Therapeutic Diversion Unit rates, the rate of infractions was 3 times as high in restrictive housing ..., the inpatient mental health admissions rate was 3.5 times as high ..., and the self-injury incident rate was 3.5 times as high.” ([AJPM, 2021](#))

In other words, for every 30 disciplinary incidents in restrictive housing, there were only 10 in the TDU. That’s much safer as well as more productive. That’s what we need to do.

In summary, this is an exciting bill that promotes safety and costs less than current practices.

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.