

Leslie Manning
Bath, ME
LD 696

Good Morning, members of the committee, I am Rev. Leslie Manning and I reside in Bath. I am an interfaith chaplain and member of the Religious Society of Friends, (Quakers), who works directly with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, their loved ones and family members and in making our communities more welcoming and supportive of the over 90% of the residents of Maine's prison and jails who return to us.

I am a former President of the Maine Council of Churches where we partnered with the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) to significantly reduce the use of solitary confinement in Maine's prisons and I currently serve as the Volunteer Coordinator with the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC). I facilitate groups inside the Maine Women's Center and the Southern Maine Women's Re-entry Center at Windham and have been involved with helping to launch Sophia's House in Lewiston, ME, a residential program for women recovering from sex trafficking, incarceration and/or addiction by working to heal the underlying trauma that resulted in the choices they made and the behavior they engaged in while in the life. In some cases, perhaps most cases, we deal with generations of trauma, mental illness and substance use disorder.

We cannot change those behaviors without dealing with the underlying trauma. No amount of prayer, mentored support and treatment programs are effective unless we address the issues of underlying trauma. Instead, we as a state further traumatize people by keeping them isolated and denying them the mental health treatments and other programmatic support they need to heal. If you are not already mentally ill when you enter the hole, many tell us, you will be afterward.

Maine does not have the death penalty, thank God and the many people who work hard to keep it that way, but we do have the moral equivalent of that penalty, a death penalty of the mind, heart and spirit of every individual who undergoes the torture of solitary, and their families. Lives are irrevocably changed and in some cases destroyed, by this obsolete and obscene tactic, and not for the better.

We currently have a commissioner for this department who says he is in the redemption business, and I believe in redemption, too. Let us redeem ourselves by ending this practice once and for all time. I ask you, especially those who believe in the sanctity of all life, and the worth and dignity of every human being, to say no to torture and yes to voting in favor of LD 696 as amended.

Thank you for your service to all the people of Maine, especially those most of us would rather not deal with. May we see them through God's eyes, each precious one.