



Maine Sheriffs' Association

"One Team, One Mission"

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February 9, 2022

L.D. 696 – An Act to Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine's Corrections System

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Scott Nichols. I am the Sheriff of Franklin County and I'm here on behalf of the Maine Sheriffs' Association. Maine sheriffs discussed this bill and voted unanimously to **oppose** L.D. 696 – An Act to Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine's Corrections System.

All Maine sheriffs work tirelessly to build and nurture relationships with legislators. All sixteen counties meet weekly to discuss legislation and discuss our positions. Many around this virtual horseshoe have worked closely with us to find language that best meets the needs of the citizens we serve.

When LD 696 was brought forward, Sheriff Kevin Joyce met with the sponsor to discuss the bill. Representative Lookner graciously spoke to Sheriff Joyce and explained that he understood Representative Warren was preparing an amendment to his bill. He indicated that his intent was to avoid having inmates locked down for twenty-three hours a day for four or five years, - which isn't happening in any of Maine's jails.

The amended language, which has not been made available to the general public via the legislature's website, was not available to the sponsor when he met with Sheriff Joyce. Maine Sheriffs received the amendment from this committee's list-serv on Wednesday, February 2. Changes of this magnitude cannot and should not be pushed through at the last minute. This is the third bill from our tracking system to have been completely rewritten this session after a public hearing in the first session. We ask this committee to strive towards more transparent efforts in the future.

Disciplinary Segregation, by definition, is punishment by removal. An inmate loses privileges and can earn back their privileges by correcting behavior. They still have access to courts/medical-mental health treatment/clothing/bedding/personal hygiene/exercise outside, etc. During this process, the physical and mental well-being of an inmate is monitored constantly. This allows corrections staff to transition problematic inmates back into the general population in a way that is safe.

Maine sheriffs unanimously posed the question, “Do these lawmakers understand the mechanics in place in our county jails?” Implementing rash and extreme laws that will ultimately endanger hundreds of inmates and county jail staff is not to be made lightly. I urge you to unanimously vote **Ought Not To Pass** and make it a priority to tour the very jails you hope to change in order to gain a greater perspective on what is actually occurring in Maine jails.

Maine sheriffs appreciate the opportunity to present to this committee. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Scott Nichols
Maine Sheriffs’ Association

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Maine Sheriffs' Association
LD 696

This testimony replaces our original submission.