

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

My name is Wendy Allen from Milford Maine. I am a formerly incarcerated woman in long term recovery. Today, I am the Young Adult Diversion Program and Policy & Advocacy Lead for Restorative Justice Institute of Maine, A coordinator for Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition and an organizer for Maine Recovery Advocacy Project. I am here today to testify in full support of LD 1721 An Act Regarding Dignity for Women in Correctional Facilities, the amended version that Rep. Talbot-Ross has previously spoken about.

I am a mother to 4 amazing children. Whitney, Daymion, Kelsey and Kallie. During my 4 year incarceration, I didn't have an opportunity to see my children at all. I was told that there was a notarized paper that was needed, although I didn't have DHS involved. I voluntarily signed my children to my mother while I was working to get my life on track. My prior prison sentence, I didn't have to have this paper. When I asked about the reasoning, I got multiple different answers, one was it was a requirement through DHHS, and the other was it was a requirement through DOC. I still don't know what one is accurate.

The affects on Mothers, that are inside and unable to reunify with their children are substantial. I have seen women have to sign custody over and have their children adopted out due to their length of sentence. How is that helpful to the mother that is trying to rehabilitate? I have seen mothers regress, lose hope, and give up on their journey of rehabilitation and recovery.

Let's talk about the affected children. My children suffered greatly from the lack of the ability to interact with me while inside. Not being able to see me and know that I was ok. Kelsey, at the age of 12 developed an eating disorder, that she is slowly recovering from. She is now 14.

I would like to read a poem that she wrote, showing the affects that lack of interaction between incarcerated mothers and children cause.

Through the Lens of a Child

Kelsey McComb

The Year of Disney Movies and Tag

We guzzled down apple juice and played

Hide N Seek

By the time we turned 6,

We learned how to

Cook our own food

And how to take care of

Ourselves.

Once I hit 7,

I moved in with my grandparents,  
Mom was taken.  
Where did she go?  
Will the bad guys bring her home again?  
Mama, come home  
I miss you.  
At the start of age 8  
I never understood why  
I felt so alone at such a young age.  
I still laughed with my friends  
And made sure my Barbie Dolls were okay.  
But, why didn't anyone check in on me?  
Fast forward to 13,  
The only way I could cope  
With my feelings was through  
Starving myself.  
If I could focus on the amount of  
Calories I consumed,  
I wouldn't have time  
To think about my mom  
Being stolen from me.  
Now, at the age of 14,  
Mama is home,  
Mama is healthy,  
But the time is gone.  
All of the years that could have  
Been spent at Sweet Frog,  
Or coffee dates with her  
Are gone.

My childhood was stolen  
My mother was  
Ripped away from me.  
That is what incarceration does to a child.  
It rips their one tiny  
Spark of hope  
Away from them.  
The light at the end of the tunnel;  
Burnt out.  
But us kids will still act okay,  
Because no one will sit us down  
And ask if we're really fine.

I strongly urge you all to vote to pass this bill as amendend.

Wendy Allen

[wallen@rjimaine.org](mailto:wallen@rjimaine.org)

(207)291-6617