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Testimony in Support
LD 1721, “An Act Regarding Dignity for Women in Correctional Facilities”
Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
February 18, 2022

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Evelyn Kieltyka and I am a Family Nurse Practitioner and Senior Vice President of Program Services at Maine Family Planning, which provides comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care via telehealth, in alternative settings, and at 18 health centers statewide. I am testifying in support of LD 1721.

The National Institutes of Health tells us that 85 percent of incarcerated women in the United States are of childbearing age. Eighty percent are already mothers, according to the Prison Policy Initiative. According to the Centers for Disease Control, persons entering correctional facilities have a high prevalence of STIs, HIV, and viral hepatitis. Yet we know from our work with underserved populations – including people who use drugs, people experiencing homelessness, and people incarcerated at the Women’s Center in Windham – that comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care, not to mention family supports, are lacking for those already harmed by criminalization and systemic inequality.

Incarcerated women need access to effective birth control, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, abortion care, pre- and post-natal care, cancer screenings, and sexual and reproductive health education. They need compassionate care and counseling from nonjudgmental providers who are experts in this type of health care. And they need assurance that their right to high-quality sexual and reproductive health care doesn’t go away at the jail or prison door.

That’s why we think it is so important that LD 1721 calls for the Board of Visitors for Women’s Services to include one member who was formerly incarcerated in the custody of the Department of Corrections; one member who represents a health care provider that provides sexual and reproductive health care and education; one member who is a health care practitioner who provides sexual and reproductive health care and education to women; and one member who has an understanding of or experience with domestic violence. These representatives will be able to draw from their lived experience and professional expertise to ensure incarcerated people in jail or correctional facilities in Maine get the care they need and deserve.

On behalf of Maine Family Planning, I urge the committee to support LD 1721 and improve the health and dignity of incarcerated people. Thank you.

Evelyn Kieltyka, MSN, MS, FNP-BC
Senior Vice President of Program Services

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