

Honorable Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Alexsea Cholewa. I am from Aroostook County and reside at the Women's Reentry Center in Windham. I am writing in support of **LD 1543 Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Recommend Cost-effective, Safe, Administrable and Healthful Programs to Reduce Violence in Prisons and Jails.**

Violence is a chain reaction system. If the first link in the chain is not handled you then have yourself more reactions. Human nature is known for fight or flight. In a jail setting I would argue that fight is used more often than flight. I would like to give my personal experience of what I witnessed in the jail system. I committed violence in jail and I am not proud of it. I did however try to take steps that would have removed one of us from the situation before things got out of hand.

In jail there is a revolving door. The staff is overworked. They often see the same people from year to year. There has to be a direct correlation with compassion fatigue. They are human and have very little time to recharge their batteries.

Entering into jail I was an emotional mess. The ladies are housed in one huge room with absolutely no privacy from one another. Our bunks were a foot apart. We did have one bathroom with a door on it. This was the only privacy we had. The emotional combination of withdrawing from drugs and a being housed in one room with ten other women had me on edge. As the days went by, I tried to deescalate a fight that was going to happen. I had my sister call the jail and let them know I was feeling uneasy with another lady I was housed with. The jail had talked to my sister briefly. My sister might not be a creditable source in the jails eyes. This should not hinder taking safety precautions though. Another day went by and there was no movement to separate us. The negative atmosphere continued. I voiced my opinion to the guards and other ladies did as well. There was a clear indication that there was one lady who was the common denominator. Instead of being safe and relocating one of us I got into a physical fight.

I want to make it known that I did provoke the situation in some ways. I did try to voice that violence was going to happen. I simply did not want to fight. I knew that if a fight did happen the jail would then separate us. The outcome resorted to the other lady continuing to get verbally abused by others. This is the chain reaction.

I am a good person and I don't want make anyone's situation any harder than it already is. We both went to segregation, which was the jails best option in some ironic way.

There has to be a better option than waiting for the violence to occur. That is why this bill **LD 1543 Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Recommend Cost-effective, Safe, Administrable and Healthful Programs to Reduce Violence in Prisons and Jails** is so important. Both of us were hurt and the problem was not solved. LD 1543 would look at where and when violence occurs. It would look at programs to decrease violence in jails and prisons and it would suggest solutions. Those solutions will teach us how to problem solve. The ultimate outcome will be safer jails and prisons and safer communities.

Thank-you for your support.

Lexsea Cholewa

Women's Reentry Center in Windham