

April 25, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is Ash Hebert, I am a resident of Waterville, and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1626.

Prior to learning about this proposed bill, I admittedly knew little about the existence, let alone the duties assigned to Boards of Visitors in State statute. Since then, my search results have yielded local results that do not always provide information that is current, accessible to the public, and reliable for communication efforts. While it was not my intention, this first attempt to learn more reinforced a need, and one that this bill can resolve.

Additions to existing statutes pertaining to Boards of Visitors also attempt to rectify communication and service barriers as amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, while people who have mental health challenges are By allowing each board of visitors to regularly inspect the facility, establish contact with people who are incarcerated or jailed as well as administrative personnel, and make recommendations on how people can be better served based on those interactions, these responsibilities encourage not only transparency but also accountability in a system that has historically lacked oversight.

Appointing people with lived experience in jails and prisons to serve on the board is another way to achieve these goals as well as addressing the under-represented voice of lived experience in the oversight of the criminal justice system. People who have been jailed or incarcerated understand the facility's operations in a more nuanced manner and can therefore offer deeply insightful suggestions. In healthcare we have seen the impact peer perspectives carry and how entire communities can benefit from embracing more well-rounded, representative, and adequately trained advisory groups. I truly believe the Boards of Visitors programs across the State will share similar strides after this bill is implemented.

In closing, I urge you to pass LD 1626. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ash Hebert

Waterville, Maine

Resources

[After 27 years, Maine still fails to comply with the court-ordered decree to improve treatment of the state's mentally ill \(themainemonitor.org\)](https://themainemonitor.org/after-27-years-maine-still-fails-to-comply-with-the-court-ordered-decree-to-improve-treatment-of-the-state-s-mentally-ill)

[Maine profile | Prison Policy Initiative](#)

[Title 30-A, §1651: Examination of jails; board of visitors \(maine.gov\)](https://www.maine.gov/legis/other/title30-a/section1651.html)

Doyle C, Gardner K and Wells K (2021) The importance of incorporating lived experience in efforts to reduce Australian reincarceration rates. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 10(2): 83-98. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.1942>