

Testimony of Paul Schlosser, Disabled Veteran

Residence: Homeless. Portland

Supporting LD 1543: Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Recommend Cost-Effective, Safe, Administrable, and Healthful Programs to Reduce Violence in Prisons and Jails

Presented by Representative Moonen

I am writing to describe to you my personal experience of violence with the prison system. I don't believe any one person can be blamed for this situation. It is simply the natural result of a lot of people being crowded together, all of whom are troubled and many of whom are sick with one or another illness.

I entered the Army in 2003 at the age of 18. Unfortunately, I was honorably discharged one year later with several diagnoses that have caused me to be disabled—PTSD, bipolar disorder and tinnitus.

I worked part-time until 2005 when I jumped off a roof and broke both my heels. This injury led to me becoming dependent on opioids and that in term led me to committing robberies to support my habit. I was ultimately arrested in 2010 and committed to Maine State Prison for seven years. During that time, I had multiple incidents of cutting behavior and was deeply depressed most of the time. It was difficult to get care for my illnesses.

During that term of imprisonment, I was confined in a chair with four limbs restrained, hooded and pepper sprayed because I had torn off a bandage that had been applied following an episode of cutting. There is a video of this episode that was made public by the Portland Press Herald in 2012. Although this episode is on you tube, I cannot watch it as it brings back memories of that experience.

After being released on probation in 2016, I was returned to the Maine state prison following a probation violation that was calling my wife to find out how my daughter was doing. My wife was in Florida at the time with our daughter. I was given three more years for that probation

violation and returned to prison in 2020 and released this month on probation.

Violence is common, even now, in the Maine state prison. I have seen many fights. Because I am disabled and weak, I try my best to stay away from these fights. It seems like violence spreads easily. The guards have a hard time controlling it. I don't see much empathy or respect demonstrated between the residents or between residents and guards.

It seems to me if there was a way for professionals from all sides of the violence issue so common in Maine prisons and jails, to get together and consider options for dealing with this on-going problem, it might make a big difference.

Thank you for considering this.