

Senator Beebe Center, Representative Salisbury and honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Arimela Shima, I currently reside in Italy, and I have a loved one, Richard, incarcerated under Maine's jurisdiction. I'm testifying 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. Richard has been both a victim of violence and has participated in violence. The main factors behind his participation in violence are his prolonged time spent in solitary confinement (most of the 19 years out of the 21 years he has been incarcerated) and his lack of proper mental health treatment. I can only speak for his situation and for what he went through. Being segregated for so long has resulted in Richard feeling anxious and vulnerable. Prison is for many people the first time they face their trauma and struggles from childhood. Richard was born and raised in violence and I think in order to reduce violence in prison it's very important to address the root cause rather than just look at the end result. Meaningful mental health treatment isn't just giving residents meds through a cell door slot. I believe successful treatment includes therapy to help them learn coping skills and mechanisms to positively interact with others.

The most violent residents need the most help because they're the ones suffering the most. Richard needed the most help. Labeling violent residents without supporting them in becoming better men and women adds to the cycle of violence.

Richard's son and I, as his loved ones, know that violence has a profound impact on us because we constantly worry about his safety. As methods to curb violence, we believe that widespread effective mental health treatment, one on one and in groups, and the curbing of periods of isolation in a cell would be the most helpful. But, a thorough investigation of programs in other correctional facilities targeted at reducing violence is essential in helping us understand what methods are most successful. These methods would benefit not only the residents but also the community. If prison is a place meant to rehabilitate, punishment shouldn't be the only method used.

I urge you to unanimously support LD 1543 Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Recommend Cost-effective, Safe, Administrable and Healthful Programs to Reduce Violence in Prisons and Jails. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Arimela Shima