

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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Testimony in opposition to LD 2204 to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety February 21, 2024

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen and a person in long-term recovery.* I am testifying in opposition to LD 2204 on behalf of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition whose goal is to promote restorative practices in order to increase public safety and the health of our community.

Once upon a time, in this very room, the district attorney and the Augusta police came to this committee asking for help. They said there was a man who was sitting in an Augusta park all the time, often with children present. There wasn't anything they could do. Their proposed solution was to bar people on the Sex Offender Registry from using public parks.

Members of this Committee were concerned. Some of us in the audience including John Pelletier, Elizabeth Ward Saxl, Walt McKee and I were recruited into an ad hoc committee that went across the hall to talk about language.

I am especially reminded of this because the story presented to the Committee wasn't true—there was **not** a man on the Registry sitting in their park. Perhaps with the best of intentions, it was a story they made up. They had a solution searching for a problem.

We believe this bill is the same situation. Although the solution may be presented with the best of intentions, we do not believe there is an actual problem needing to be solved.

* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.

Moreover, the bill adds on the proviso that those with certain citizenships cannot now use the park.

Moreover, if they use high amp sneakers, the police can investigate them with no other probable cause.

Even if you believe there is a drug racketeering problem and prosecutors need additional tools, these gratuitous additions to LD 2204 are especially embarrassing, probably illegal, and should be defeated.

We urge you to unanimously vote Ought Not To Pass on the entire bill.

Thank you for your generous attention.

I would be happy to answer any questions.