

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



Tuesday, January 11, 2024

Greetings Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and Honorable Members of the Criminal Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

My name is Jan Collins, I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. I am here to support **L.D. 2001 An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies.**

MPAC's mission is to support Maine's incarcerated citizens, their families, and friends, in their struggle with Maine's criminal justice system. Our purpose is to reduce Maine's use of incarceration by creating a system that is ethical, humane, and restorative in nature.

I am a retired HS science teacher who also held social studies certification.

The consequences of leaving large portions of our population out of our national narrative, out of our history books, and out of our classrooms are evident in **our** treatment of people of color.

When we see people as different, we treat them, consciously or unconsciously, as different.

People of color are more likely to be charged, more likely to be convicted and more likely to receive harsh jail and prison sentences than their white counterparts. (1,2,3,4,)

What we do not understand, we fear, and what we fear, we punish.

Maine has the 6th highest racial disparity within its incarcerated population, A 2021 report found Black Mainers were locked up at a rate 9.2 times higher than white Mainers.(5)

The consequences of our unequal treatment of people of color has lasting consequences on individuals, families, and our society as a whole that

perpetuate poverty and discrimination in the legal system, housing, education, and employment.

I believe that the absence of African American history from textbooks has contributed to unequal treatment of individuals and communities.

Much of our country's wealth was built on the free labor of enslaved peoples. Yet, the contributions of people of color often go unacknowledged in our textbooks and classes. Maine students deserve to learn history with all its complexities.

When we understand each other, when we embrace our differences, when we honor our cultures and histories, we create an environment where we can all thrive. We can be our best selves.

I strongly urge the committee to unanimously approve the passage of **L.D. 2001 An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies.**

Thank-you for your support.

With appreciation,

Jan M. Collins

*Assistant Director
Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition*

BOV Franklin County Jail

*PO Box 360, E. Wilton, ME 04234
207.578.8419*

¹See, e.g., Sonja B. Starr & M. Marit Rehani, Racial Disparity in Federal Criminal Charging and its Sentencing Consequences, U OF MICHIGAN LAW & ECON, EMPIRICAL LEGAL STUDIES CENTER PAPER NO. 12-002 (2012); Marc Mauer, Addressing Racial Disparities in Incarceration, 91 PRISON JOURNAL (2011); THE SENTENCING PROJECT, RACIAL DISPARITY IN SENTENCING: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE (2005), available at http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd_sentencing_review.pdf.

² U.S. SENTENCING COMM'N, REPORT ON THE CONTINUING IMPACT OF UNITED STATES V. BOOKER ON FEDERAL SENTENCING (Jan. 30, 2013), available at <http://www.ussc.gov/news/congressional-testimony-and-reports/booker-reports/report-continuing-impact-united-states-v-bookerfederal-sentencing>.

³ Cassia C. Spohn, Thirty Years of Sentencing Reform: The Quest for a Racially Neutral Sentencing Process, in CRIMINAL JUSTICE 427 (2000), available at <http://www.justicestudies.com/pubs/livelink3-1.pdf>.

4 Sonja B. Starr & M. Marit Rehavi, Racial Disparity in Federal Criminal Charging and its Sentencing Consequences, U OF MICHIGAN LAW & ECON, EMPIRICAL LEGAL STUDIES CENTER PAPER NO. 12-002 (2012)

5. Maine has 6th highest racial disparity within its incarcerated population, report finds. In 2021, Black Mainers were locked up at a rate 9.2 times higher than white Mainers

<https://mainemorningstar.com/2023/09/29/report-maine-has-6th-highest-racial-disparity-within-its-incarcerated-population-report-finds/>

Jan Collins
East Wilton/Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition
LD 2001

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