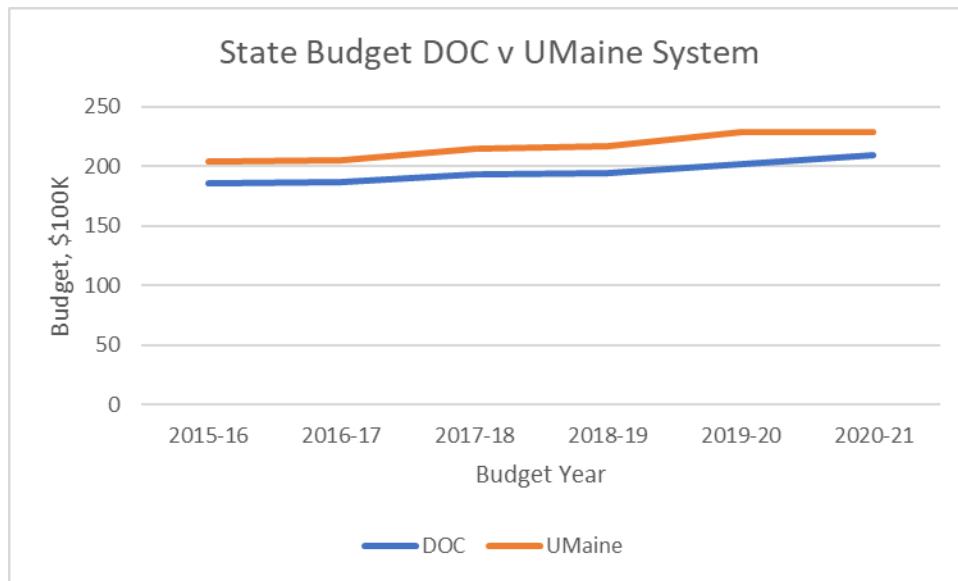


Thomas Kircher, resident of Biddeford, Maine

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE:

About some 35 years ago or so I was in conversation with a chaplain at a county jail in Southeast Pennsylvania and he told me something that stuck with me, even after all these years. He looked at me and said something to the effect, "We've passed a milestone here in Pennsylvania. This year the State will spend more on its prison system than its higher educational system." Somehow, we both were at a loss for words for a moment or two.

Here in Maine things are not quite that desperate. I made a graph of budget numbers taken from the State website for the DOC and the UMaine system. The budgets are of similar magnitude and show a similar growth trend.



While it's generally recognized as a good thing to fund higher education, helping people develop their potentials and use their gifts and talents as a constructive force in society, I wonder what might be said about the ever-increasing cost of incarcerating people? What are we hoping for, what are we getting in return? And where does it end?

The United States leads the world in incarceration rate, at 639 people in prison per 100,000 people. Countries like Germany, Canada, and the UK have incarceration rates of 69, 107, and 114 (source: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/incarceration-rates-by-country>)

If we, as a society, are not searching for alternatives, for a better way, if we close our collective eyes to an alternate vision of what constitutes harm and justice, what the tradeoffs are between retribution and restoration, then we have failed our future and our children's future. We simply cannot continue down a path for which we pay so much and get so little in return.

Please consider LD1226, if nothing else, as a small, very small, investment in our collective journey as a people. Take this step, now. The time is right. Wisdom demands it. The generations to come are asking us to do better.

Thank you.

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