



March 11, 2020

Dear Senator Deschambeault, Representative Warren, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety;

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, with a focus on the most marginalized populations and communities.

We are here today **in support of LD 1422, "An Act Regarding Conditions in Correctional Facilities for Female Prisoners."** We thank Representative Talbot Ross for sponsoring this important bill.

As we shared in the recent hearing for LD 2085 (in support of reproductive and sexual health and education for incarcerated women) incarcerated women have high levels of lifetime trauma, high levels of experience of sexual violence, and are most often incarcerated because of drug use and possession. At the same time, the number of incarcerated women has increased significantly in recent year, rising from only 25 women in Maine's state prison in 2002 to approximately 220 as of last year¹. The increase in women in carceral settings has highlighted a problem that has always been true: prisons and jails are designed overwhelmingly for male-identified inmates, and this has created a range of male-oriented default systems.

LD 1422, along with LD 2085, seeks to increase equity across gender identity in corrections settings. Among the reasons we support this bill:

- It acknowledges that **basic health care for women may include specific care** or services and ensures that they are included in the standards across the carceral system. It also ensures a **method for accountability**.
- **It acknowledges that most female inmates are also parents and ensures that visitation is aligned with the standards of Child Protective Services.** As we have heard from the professionals at CPS in Maine, visitation with parents and caregivers is an important part of child welfare, even when (or perhaps especially when) parents are incarcerated, but we have also heard that this practice is not uniform across the state.
- **It ensures that incarcerated parents are included in the ongoing assessment and reporting that is already occurring in the child welfare system.**
- **It ensures that the needs of incarcerated women are represented on the Board of Visitors.**

¹ Maine Public. (2019). As Prison Population Grows DOC Plans to Relocate Women. Retrieved from <https://www.mainepublic.org/post/prison-population-grows-maines-doc-plans-relocate-women-long-creek>



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- It attempts to standardize certain practices across different counties and within the state-level system. **People should have equitable access to gender-responsive corrections no matter where they lived before incarceration.**

Collectively, we simply must start recognizing the intersection of trauma and substance use disorder, and how those issues combined with our public policy regarding drug use and possession have ensured that more women than ever before are being incarcerated in Maine. Incarceration is not a healing place for people with trauma or substance use disorder, and we simply must do better. I would rather spend our agency time advocating for increased access to trauma-focused services, mental health services, substance use treatment, and decreased criminal penalties for drug use and possession.

Still, until we are able to collectively address the structural reasons that so many women are being incarcerated, we will advocate for correctional settings and services that are gender responsive and equitable across the state. LD 1422 seeks to do that, and **we hope you will vote Ought to Pass on this bill.**

Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
Maine Women's Lobby / mainewomen.org