



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony of Whitney Parrish

Maine Women's Lobby

In support of LD 1422

An Act Regarding Conditions in Correctional Facilities for Female Prisoners

May 29, 2019

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety: my name is Whitney Parrish, Director of Policy and Program for the Maine Women's Lobby. The Maine Women's Lobby is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide membership organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine's 678,000 women and girls.

I am pleased to speak to you today in strong support of LD 1422, *An Act Regarding Conditions in Correctional Facilities for Female Prisoners*.

This concept draft, which proposes to enact measures designed to ensure the fair treatment of Maine women who are incarcerated, is a critical step toward addressing the fair and equitable treatment of all incarcerated Maine people. While we have taken the tremendous step forward this session to ensure that all menstruating incarcerated people have access to menstrual products, there are myriad areas within our correctional system that can be studied, improved, or addressed, including but not limited to oversight, policies related to pregnant people and health care, parenting during incarceration and family reunification support, African-American and culturally specific hygiene products, and gender-responsive staff trainings. Every time I have worked with women at Maine Correctional Center, the number one underlying concern coming out of their requests is related to gender-responsive policies and equitable treatment to their male counterparts. They are the experts of their own situations and lives, and we trust them to guide this process as we build supports for them through the legislative process.

Prison is the punishment; unfair treatment within prisons is not. The prison system as a whole was not designed for women, so they, and particularly Black women and women of color, often face steep challenges that most of their male counterparts do not and will not. We believe that LD 1422 is vitally necessary to address any unfair or inequitable treatment faced by incarcerated Maine women. Thank you for your time.