



March 2, 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 2085, "An Act to Ensure Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Care and Education in All Maine's Jails and State Correctional and Detention Facilities."** We thank Representative Talbot Ross for sponsoring this important bill.

In 2002, there were only 25 women in Maine's state prison. That number has grown almost ten times, to approximately 220 as of last year¹, and the number of women incarcerated at the county level has grown substantially as well. At the same time, the number of male inmates dwarfs the number of women; Maine's prison and jails have been designed overwhelmingly for male-identified inhabitants.

For women, though, sexual and reproductive health care is basic healthcare. It is the bare minimum that must be delivered in order to ensure the health of the people in the state's custody. That is the fundamental reason that the Maine Women's Lobby supports this proposal.

I could stop there – but I want to share a few other reasons that this bill is important:

- According to the Maine Dept. Of Corrections, **the majority of incarcerated women in Maine have a history of trauma.** ² As a longtime sexual assault response advocate, I can tell you that in the vast majority of these cases, the trauma is sexual in nature – making sexual and reproductive health care all the more relevant and essential. In fact, approximately 60 percent of girls entering juvenile facilities are survivors of sexual violence.³
- **Sexual activity – both consensual and nonconsensual – occurs in incarcerated settings.** Sexual health and family planning services are some of the best prevention for public health needs and prophylaxis, as well as the best response to nonconsensual sexual activity.

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>

² Maine Dept. Of Corrections. (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://www.maine.gov/corrections/Evidence-based-Programming-Treatment.htm>

³ Just Detention International. (2013). Vulnerable Detainees: Survivors of Previous Sexual Abuse. Retrieved from <https://justdetention.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FS-Vulnerable-Detainees-Survivors-of-Previous-Sexual-Abuse.pdf>



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- **The proposal includes jails, which will ensure more consistency – and therefore more equity – for every incarcerated woman in Maine.**
- **The proposal includes an ongoing Advisory Council.** As someone who has worked in structural and systems change for many years, and as you no doubt know, simply having the idea and making it obligatory is virtually never enough. Passing the law is the start of the effort; the Advisory Council is how we ensure that the idea is operationalized, the standards are met, the application is uniform, and the resources are high-quality and connected with the community.

Incarcerated women are some of our state's most vulnerable citizens, with significantly higher rates of sexual trauma, intimate partner violence, human trafficking and sexual exploitation, substance use disorder, and mental health needs than the population as a whole. Ensuring that they have access to the full range of health services and education – which includes sexual and reproductive health and education – is essential to improving equity for the folks who most need it.

Please vote 'yes' on LD 2085. Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
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