



March 1, 2021

Dear Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs;

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 opposition to the criminal justice budget as it was presented.**

How we choose to spend our resources as a state is an expression of our values, and that commitment shapes our communities. The criminal justice budget in particular shapes the lives of women and girls in our state.

In 2002, there were only 25 women in Maine's state prison. In almost two decades, that number has grown almost ten times, to approximately 220 as of last year<sup>1</sup>, and the number of women incarcerated at the county level has grown substantially as well. Women now make up almost one in four jail admissions in Maine (while male jail admissions have declined).

- According to the Maine Dept. Of Corrections, **the majority of incarcerated women in Maine have a history of trauma.**<sup>2</sup>
- Nationwide, approximately 60 percent of girls entering juvenile facilities are survivors of sexual violence.<sup>3</sup> There is bright line between sexual abuse and incarceration. **Incarcerated women are 30 times more likely to have experienced rape than women outside of prison.**<sup>4</sup>
- In Maine, **three of four women in prison (72%) are there on drug and theft charges.**<sup>5</sup>
- **Women and girls from communities who are already oppressed or disenfranchised are more likely to be incarcerated.** For example, the highest rates of prison admissions

---

<sup>1</sup> 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>

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

<sup>3</sup> 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>

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey, Truman & Langton, 2012. U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>5</sup> Neuman, D. (2019). 72% of women in Maine's prisons are there on drug-related charges. Maine Beacon. Retrieved from <https://mainebeacon.com/72-of-women-in-maines-prisons-are-there-on-drug-related-charges/>



in Maine are in rural counties.<sup>6</sup> Nationally, Black girls are 14% of the general population nationally but 33.2% of girls detained and committed.<sup>7</sup> One study showed that LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming (GNC) girls are significantly more likely to be system-involved: 40% of girls in the juvenile justice system are LGBT/GNC compared to 14% of boys.<sup>8</sup>

- **The annual cost per inmate in 2017 is \$43,773<sup>9</sup> (approximately 50% more than Maine's per capita income in 2019<sup>10</sup>).**

In short – while people have their own unique experiences and paths, the average incarcerated women in Maine is a trauma survivor who struggles with substance use, and one can surmise that those two experiences are connected.

While we never consider the cost of incarceration when deciding on a person's sentencing, the cost of services is a huge barrier to Mainers getting their needs met. Domestic violence shelters do not have enough beds for survivors of intimate partner violence – even less so for those who struggle with substance misuse. Recovery services are overwhelmed with the demand. The sexual assault helpline gets over 10,000 contacts per year and yet can't afford to extend text/chat hours to the times when demand is greatest. Once Mainers are incarcerated, the available services do not meet the full need. When we came before this committee one year ago to talk about sexual and reproductive health for women (an essential health service), the discussion was that the Department couldn't afford it.

**Until a bed in a domestic violence shelter, a recovery house, or a treatment program is as widely available to women in need as a bed in the jail or prison, we must think differently about where we invest our resources.**

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director

---

<sup>6</sup> Vera Institute of Justice. (2019). Incarceration trends in Maine. Retrieved from

<https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-maine.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Saar, M., et al. (2015). The sexual abuse to prison pipeline; the girls' story. Human Rights Project for Girls; Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality; and Ms. Foundation for Women. Retrieved from [https://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015\\_COP\\_sexual-abuse\\_layout\\_web-1.pdf](https://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015_COP_sexual-abuse_layout_web-1.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Irvine, A. (2015). Time to Expand the Lens on Girls in the Juvenile Justice System. National Council on Crime and Delinquency. Retrieved from <http://www.nccdglobal.org/blog/time-to-expand-the-lens-on-girls-in-the-juvenile-justice-system>

<sup>9</sup> National Institute of Corrections. (2017). 2017 Statistics; Maine 2017. Retrieved from <https://nicic.gov/state-statistics/2017/maine-2017>

<sup>10</sup> US Census Bureau. (2021). Maine Quick Facts. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ME/HSG010219>