



April 30, 2021

Dear Senator Deschambault, 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 967, "An Act To Make Possession of Scheduled Drugs for Personal Use a Civil Penalty,"** and we thank Representative Perry for sponsoring this bill.

We are incarcerating more women – not fewer – in recent years. 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 year¹, 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).

The majority of incarcerated women in Maine have a history of trauma.² For example, nationwide, incarcerated women are 30 times more likely to have experienced rape than women outside of prison.³

Women with a history of trauma are significantly more likely to develop substance use and misuse.⁴

Drug crimes are fueling the increase in incarceration among Maine women. Three of four women in prison (72%) are there on drug and theft charges.⁵

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 experiences are connected.

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 Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey, Truman & Langton, 2012. U.S. Department of Justice.

⁴ Lotzin, et al. (2019). Profiles of Childhood Trauma in Women With Substance Use Disorders and Comorbid Posttraumatic Stress Disorders. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. Retrieved from <https://dx.doi.org/10.3389%2Ffpsy.2019.00674>.

⁵ 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/>



Additionally, the carceral system itself perpetuates violence. Women experience violence while incarcerated, and incarceration and subsequent criminal records increase the barriers to employment, housing, safety net services, and education. Incarceration also disrupts family connections, inflicting trauma on another generation. It also disproportionately affects women and girls from communities who are already oppressed or disenfranchised, who are more likely to be incarcerated. For example, the highest rates of prison admissions in Maine are in rural counties.⁶ Nationally, African-American girls are 14% of the general population nationally but 33.2% of girls detained and committed.⁷ 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.⁸

Trauma, mental health, and substance use are interconnecting issues that are harming our families and communities. Addressing this harm through punitive, incarceration-based responses perpetuates that cycle of violence. **It is time to acknowledge that there are better, safer, more holistic ways to address the challenges in our communities, and to redirect our energy and resources to meeting those challenges to meet the real needs of Mainers.**

We hope you will vote 'ought to pass' on LD 967.

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director

⁶ Vera Institute of Justice. (2019). Incarceration trends in Maine. Retrieved from <https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-maine.pdf>

⁷ 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

⁸ 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>.