

DRAFT CORRECTIONS OFFICER LETTER

It's one thing to look at these numbers on a spreadsheet in Augusta; it's another thing entirely to be the one turning the key when the floor is understaffed and the facility is overflowing.

Working in a Maine county jail right now feels like being asked to hold back a flood with a leaky bucket. We aren't just "corrections officers" anymore. On any given shift, I am a mental health crisis worker, a de-escalation specialist, and a first responder to overdoses—all while working in a building that was never designed for this level of acuity.

The Reality on the Floor

- **The "Wait-List" Jail:** Because state mental health facilities are full, people in crisis are sitting in our cells for months. They aren't getting the clinical help they need, and their condition worsens while they wait. This makes the environment more volatile and dangerous for both the staff and the residents.
- **The Staffing Death Spiral:** When the state freezes funding, our wages stagnate. Why would someone take the risk of working in a high-stress jail environment when they can make the same hourly rate—or more—at a local warehouse or fast-food chain? This leads to forced overtime, burnout, and "skeleton crews," which only increases the safety risks.
- **Doing More with Less:** We see the rising costs every day. From the price of the food we serve to the skyrocketing costs of the medical supplies and life-saving medications (like Narcan) we have to keep on hand, every dollar is stretched thin.

The Impact of the Funding Gap

When the state keeps that **\$20.4 million allocation** frozen, they are essentially saying that the safety of the people working in these buildings isn't a priority. We are the ones dealing with the "increased length of stay" for inmates with substance use disorders. We are the ones managing the complex medical needs that the state-imposed property tax cap doesn't cover.

We are tired of being the state's "Plan B" for mental health care without being given the "Plan A" resources to do it safely. We show up every day to keep our communities safe, but we need the state to show up for us.