

March 7, 2011

Maine Legislator
Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
100 State Street
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Legislator:

My name is Souen Kim, and I am a resident of Portland, Maine. This letter is to ask for your support on LD 690, "An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Transfer of Prisoners to Other States."

I am one of the prisoners whose life has been negatively effected by the current policy of the Maine Department of Corrections. The department's decision to transfer me to Massachusetts has harmed me and my family. I hope after my brief account, you will support this much needed change.

In 1998, I began serving a sentence at Maine State Prison, MSP for short. I was 19 when I came into the system and heavily involved in a "gangster" lifestyle. My first few years incarcerated were full of stereotypical prison troubles. But, as I grew older, I was tired of the craziness. MSP provided me with an environment to improve myself and leave gang life behind. I went over a year without disciplinary issues of any kind, when, unbeknownst to me, I was targeted for transfer.

Without warning, on April 6, 2004, at approximately 2 a.m., prison staff transferred me to MCI-Walpole (now called Cedar Junction) in Massachusetts. I was provided no explanation on why I was being moved and offered no opportunity to appeal the decision.

The move to Walpole was very traumatic. As one of the only Asian-Americans at the facility, I stood out immediately. Threats of violence and narrow escapes became a way of life. Consequently, I was forced back into gang life, simply to survive. Still, I worked hard to avoid trouble, and after six years at the level-six super-max facility at Walpole, I was moved to a more relaxed facility.

*Unfortunately, upon arrival at MCI-Norfolk, it was made clear I wasn't welcome there either. However it was the administration, not the inmates, who caused me problems. **I was denied access to legal resources from my home state and prevented from participating in education and re-entry programs, all because I am from Maine.***

The problem became so bad that I was finally forced to file a lawsuit in federal court. My hope was the Commonwealth would simply send me home. Instead, they settled, agreeing to change some minor policies and told me to file my case in Maine – which is in process.

For Maine, I am out-of-sight and out-of-mind. Requests for transfers and information are routinely ignored. The state is also ineffective in communicating with Massachusetts. I am constantly struggling with the administration over my release date. Maine has the correct one on file, while the Massachusetts Department of Corrections has a release date that is ten years later!

Routinely, I file for a transfer back to Maine. I encounter one of two responses: either Maine doesn't want me because I am too much of a "trouble maker," or Massachusetts doesn't want to send me because I am a "model inmate." The irony might be funny, if it wasn't so frustrating.

Equally harmed by my transfer is my family. What was a 45-minute drive to visit me, as turned into a 6-hour trek. My parents spend twice as much time traveling to see me, as we get to actually visit. Weekly phone calls are now monthly due to the high long distance rates. When my family attempts to contact the Maine DOC for answers, they usually encounter the same brick wall I do.

I implore you, please support LD 690. It may be the only chance I have to get home; the only chance to be closer to my family, grow through educational programs, and prepare to reenter society in a positive manner.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,
Souen Kim
DOC# 389549