

03/06/2023

Commission Chairs and Members of the Commission,

I really appreciate you taking the time to look at re-establishing parole in Maine. I have become aware and invested in the re-establishment of parole since I befriended an individual who is incarcerated in the Maine prison system. It seems quite disturbing and sad to me that this issue would not have been important to me if I had not had this friendship. By having this personal relationship, I wholeheartedly understand why parole is a necessary right. I wonder how many other citizens, especially those on the committee and lawmakers, are as ill-informed as I was. I want to urge the committee members to set aside any fear-based reactions and instead guide their decisions with empathy and awareness towards big picture problem solving for those incarcerated and those they have harmed.

My friend who is incarcerated committed his crime over 12 years ago, when he was 18 years old. Since then, he has drastically changed his worldview, and moves through life in a demeanor upholding ethical standards beyond most free-to-roam citizens. My friend has proven that when restorative practices are in place, there can be healing within the self and the communities one resides in. He now carries a wisdom that emanates good will, resiliency and understanding. If we can put a system into place, like restorative justice, that supports and motivates change, the benefits of this would not only help incarcerated individuals, but also the victims, communities, and societies they live in.

I am a therapist and work with people coming from a multitude of backgrounds, traumatic experiences and complex personalities. We now know that not only behaviors can change but actual personality is fluid. Personality changes happen in many circumstances, for many reasons. It seems clear that a parole process that aligns with restorative justice practices could be the supportive practice needed for change. Could restorative justice practices between perpetrator and victim be a required protocol, if the victim so chooses, before parole? This type of action could have unprecedented ripple effects if adapted.

My friend is in the category of the quarter of the individuals incarcerated with over 10-year sentences. It makes a lot of sense to me that part of the focus of this committee is to figure out more ethical options for this group of people. While listening in on the committee meetings, I sometimes hear fear-based reactions to seemingly simple ideas. It seems the only arguments I've heard against parole are fear-based. Yes, there are a lot of details to work out, there is no doubt about that. I have admired the committee's ability to address the details and nuances of such a complex law. I ask of you: please do not let fear invade common sense decisions. Please set fear aside and observe truth. If the committee can set any fear-based beliefs and assumptions aside, truth can be deduced in objective ways. Would you want to be punished and reminded, for a lifetime, of a mistake you made over 20 years ago? We are not our mistakes, just as a victim does not want to stay a victim. How can we write a law that will help restore health on both ends?

I really appreciate your efforts in a more equitable and ethical system. Thank you!

With much sincerity,

April Hayes, M.A.
Love University
<https://lovevt.love>

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LD 178
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