

Steven Spitzer  
Jericho Circle  
LD 178

I am testifying in support of LD 178. I have worked as a volunteer in federal, state and county correctional insitutions in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, California, New York and Maine since 2001. I have seen the impact of criminal justice policies first-hand in prisons of all custody levels in different parts of the country ([www.jerichocircle.org](http://www.jerichocircle.org)). My work in Maine has been specifically at Maine State Prison in Warren over the last 10 years.

In this work, which is based on strengthening emotional literacy, accountability and integrity in men's circles, I have encountered hundreds of men, many of whom have committed violent crimes and served many years behind the walls who have demonstrated a capacity to reinvent themselves and become exemplary citizens. The work that Jericho Circle has done out of sight has made statistically, spiritually and individually significant differences for men who otherwise would have remained buried and bitter behind the walls.

In states, where parole for those serving long or life sentences is possible, many of these men, in some cases on lifetime parole, have returned to their communities and come to work with us as mentors and credible messengers. In those roles they have helped interrupt the vicious cycle of trauma-initiated violence ("hurt people hurt people") by rebuilding their lives, modeling maturity and demonstrating a different kind of courage to young men who have lost faith in society and themselves.

Parole is not a panacea for incarcerated men in every case, but if it is administered with justice and compassion, it offers an opportunity to recognize that those behind bars are still members of the human species and should not be measured solely by the worst things they have ever done. For the sake of the next generation of our children and the safety our communities please consider revising the law that puts those behind bars beyond humanity and hope.

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"Healing Circles to Bring Down the Walls"