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Dear Commission Chairs and Members of the Commission,  
I deeply appreciate all your work to re-establish parole in Maine. Over a year ago, a couple of colleagues of mine and myself began to dialogue with an individual incarcerated in the Maine prison system. He has been in the system for over twelve years now, since he was 18 years old. Early in his sentence, he met someone who taught him about restorative practice. Because of starting restorative justice practice, this resident has taken his time in prison to look both at his past and present, to re-evaluate his life, heal from his traumas, take ownership for his crime, and is now doing restorative justice work within the prison system. He has come to see a deeper aspect of himself and, simply stated, is an extraordinary human being. He has more integrity than most of the people I know. I visited him this past February and realized that I had a true friend. This results from many hours spent with him over the past year culminating in our visit. He is someone that is living each day with integrity, kindness, and intelligence.

Parole gives residents a glimmer of hope and something to work towards. Parole also gives the State, community members, and victims of crimes an opportunity to see the work that the prisons are doing to heal and educate residents. Parole illustrates that residents can be successful members of society and restore justice for the injustice they committed.

I understand the fear that is there. However, if we could take a step back and understand that most of these residents have back stories, many have lived lives full of trauma and impoverishment, and their issues are complex. This does not make the crime they committed okay, but it gives a much greater understanding of what led the particular person to commit a crime. I think about community. What would happen if a loved one or a friend was struggling?

My hope is that we would want to help each resident do the necessary work to restore justice, heal from their traumas and find peace within themselves. I understand that doing so would take a community.... And that is the type of world in which I want to live in.

By re-establishing parole, my hope is that Maine is on the road to seeing community this way.

My work as a therapist and teacher has led me to understand that human beings are innately good and that no one starts out as a criminal. Many factors impact us as human beings. We live in a highly dysfunctional culture with a hierarchical system in place. Many people are oppressed in our society, which can create trauma and a lack of resources that impact an individual's growth. In all cases, there is a possibility for healing and letting go of the psychologically dysfunctional conditioning.

Parole illustrates that we are a community that values human beings and sees that everyone has an opportunity to change and heal.

If love drove our decisions instead of fear, re-instituting parole in Maine would be necessary. What if you put yourself in the shoes of a resident? If you had a similar background, could you have committed that crime or a similar one? Would you want to be punished for a lifetime based on a crime committed years ago? What would happen if you changed, began to heal, and illustrated that you were not a threat to society? What would the right action be? Please take this into consideration when deciding on re-establishing parole in Maine.

Again, thank you for taking the time to look at this issue.  
With much compassion,

Garin Samuelsen, M.A. M.S.