

**To: Honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee.**

**Re: Testimony on behalf of LD 178**

**March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

Honorable members of the Legislative,

I am writing this letter as a personal testimony in favor of LD 178. My name is Nicole Lemay and I am currently an incarcerated member of Maine's population. I am one of the fortunate individuals who will soon be released on the Supervised Community Release Program. Words cannot express how grateful I am for the opportunity of being released after serving half of my prison sentence. During my incarceration, I have made the best of educational opportunities and will be graduating college in May. Throughout my experience, I have met many amazing human beings with whom I share a common experience; mistakes that led to incarceration. Our stories and crimes may vary but the one thing we have in common is the desire for a second chance.

I believe humanity is built on second chances. The Maine Model of Corrections has been a role model for other correctional centers across the nation. Maine has set the pace for modernized prison systems which are providing educational opportunities, employment training, rehabilitation programs, and most importantly: humanization. These efforts indeed have the power to fulfill the goal of rebuilding and transforming lives. There is no denying that these are all wonderful contributors to personal growth within the incarcerated population but we are still falling short of *real* change. Restorative justice practices are being taught as a part of the Maine Model of Corrections, but Maine is falling short of what we can do.

When I think of Maine bringing parole back into existence, I envision the faces of many college students, inspiring individuals, who are clinging to a thread of hope. Hope that keeps humans moving forward and doing the very best that they can, in their current situation. I picture the men and women who desire a safe, positive, and fulfilling community outside of the prison walls. These are the individuals who dream of contributing and helping Maine's communities upon release.

Those who would qualify for the opportunity for parole would be those who have demonstrated that they are at a low risk of reoffending and are indeed rehabilitated. Incarcerated individuals would be driven towards completing rehabilitation programming, furthering education, and building employment skills, simply by the hope of living a fulfilling life once again. If parole was brought back to Maine, our beautiful state would save millions of dollars from the cost of housing prisoners alone. This is money that could be put back into healing our communities.

As a fellow Mainer, I value our honorable state and all of the people in it. I have faith that we will work together to move forward past the 47 years of no parole. I challenge those in opposition of LD 178 to spend time in the educational settings within the prison walls. I have hope that opposes would gain a little empathy, a lot of courage, and a spark of inspiration to move Maine in a different direction. Please support the reentry and reintegration of our beloved Mainers.

Respectfully, Nicole Lemay