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I worked for the Department of Corrections for nearly a decade. I had the privilege of being part of the an original workforce whose focus was introducing and implementing restorative justice and practices within Long Creek youth development center. I was able to watch these practices grow and evolve throughout the entire department. Most of my time was spent on the juvenile side however, I was introduced to an opportunity to work with adult residents near the end of my time. These men had been trying to facilitate a program called Bridges for juveniles for many years. The time was finally here and they were able to use their experiences to help, connect and guide young men to navigate the system in which they were now a part of. They showed them how they could use their trials and tribulations to make better choices and not end up in the larger adult system. I was beyond blown away with the success of this program and the men I was able to work with. From here I had the pleasure to help facilitate more restorative practices at other adult facilities and learned more and more about the people who were stuck behind these concrete walls. I chose to work on the juvenile side for many reasons and I had my reservations about all of it. However, I ask myself why? I was seeing so many similarities in these adult's stories that I was seeing with our youth. We work so hard to intervene with our youth and believe they are capable of change. Do adults not matter because we think they've missed their chance? Many of these "adults" were locked up at age 18. Think where you were at that age. We're you truly able to navigate the world? There are people everywhere that are making mistakes and choices they regret. Does this make them a bad person? More times than not, no. Do they take opportunities to do better and be better? Maybe. We need to allow people who have made certain choices the opportunity for redemption. Redemption is possible. I've literally seen it! The system should be supporting the process of people taking what they have learned, work they've done with their victims and allowing them to use their strengths to contribute positivity to our communities. Working in DOC I was exposed to many systematic failures and this is something we actually have an opportunity to fix and recreate for our state. If we are truly taking a new and improved Maine Model of Correction's stance than there should be no question to whether we should have a parole system. We are consistently leaving behind people doing decades in prison. This is easy to do when you're not exposed to the daily happenings that occur behind the walls. We're not debating that people hurt others but this shouldn't be a business of continual hurt. Parole is an opportunity for those who have made changes and have done the work to be better humans, and it also allows for those who need more time to remain inside. It's a no brainer. I don't need to go into statistics on money that will be saved by letting people out before their original release date or the actual number of people who reoffend on parole, especially of violent crimes. I trust that you can read and educate yourselves. We as a department, a state, a system and a community need to do better for our people that we once welcomed with open arms. No one is perfect and those who are seeking a way to say they are sorry, to contribute to society and use what they have left of this lifetime to try again should absolutely have the right to do so. Let's find the balance in all of this. Imagine that someone you love is incarcerated. Would you want to give them a second chance? It's our job to help speak for those who have lost their voices. Let's start here.