

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Jan Bindas-Tenney and I am a resident of South Portland, Maine.

I am writing to you today to show my absolute support for LD 178 and the effort to re-establish parole in Maine. There are so many reasons I support this bill. I support the economic arguments for why reinstating parole makes sense, the rehabilitative arguments, the small way reinstating parole will address awful rates of racist over-incarceration of Black and Brown people in Maine. I also just think it's the right thing to do. We as Mainers must care for one another and recognize when our money, time, systems cause deep harm and do all we can do to right them.

To be clear, I am testifying as a Mainer who cares about my community today and I am not here on behalf of any of my current or former employers.

I grew up in the White Mountains in New Hampshire in a town that was a paper mill town and became a prison town. First a federal and then a state facility popped up when the paper mill shuttered. Those facilities became the biggest housing complexes and largest employers in my rural hometown. Friends and neighbors I grew up with either worked at or were incarcerated in the prisons.

I have close friends, loved ones, colleagues, mentors who have spent decades incarcerated in Maine. They have all been ready for community re-entry far before afforded the opportunity according to law. Their children, extended families and networks have suffered, as they have suffered, due to their long term separation.

I am devastated and unsurprised by the disproportionately long sentences given to Black and Brown Mainers and the disparate impact a lack of parole system has on Black and Brown Mainers. We have a duty to right that wrong.

In my various roles I've held since I moved to Maine in 2015, I've taught programs, advocated with and collaborated closely with people currently and formerly incarcerated in Maine's prison facilities. All of those people are vital community members, leaders, caregivers, mothers, and fathers, daughters and sons. They have made mistakes, as I have, as we all have. I see them repairing harm and investing in their growth.

We have a problem in Maine and the whole United States of over-incarceration, of a racist criminal legal system and under-investment in community resources. I am tired of the waste of money and human life and dignity that goes into our prison system in Maine. I recognize that there is great working happening in MDOC facilities to offer education, programming, job training, space for growth for residents and staff. However, we are hypocritical when we invest in those programs and do not invest in meaningful re-entry opportunities for safer, reintegrated communities. People must

have a way back home. We must create fair, just, and transparent pathways for decarceration and community support.

Parole just makes common sense. Every person deserves dignity, the opportunity to repair harm, better themselves and create meaningful purpose in their lives surrounded by their community, loved ones, children and family. I really believe that.

Reinstating parole is an important step toward investing in our Maine communities to make us strong, resilient and connected. Beyond reinstating parole, I hope Maine will establish a fair, transparent and rigorous parole system.

Thank you for your work and for considering my opinion. I hope I can count on your support for LD 178.

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