

Danielle Ward  
Camden  
LD 178

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

My name is Danielle, I currently reside in Camden, Maine, and I am writing on behalf of myself and others in Maine who've experienced incarceration to restore parole by passing LD 178 legislation. Human beings make mistakes, some worse than others, but those mistakes should not define us for the rest of our lives. It should be essential to consider what each incarcerated individual has done to learn, grow, and change from those mistakes. Acknowledging the factors that took place in the individual's life before incarceration, what they have done during incarceration, and looking into their developmental, transitional, and transformational changes will give the parole board more of an understanding in making a conscious decision to allow that individual to reenter back into society.

Every day changes are being made in the state, some good, some bad. The state of Maine and its people are always willing to try new things to see what does and does not work. So why are we not giving parole another chance? It's hard for me to believe that with all the changes occurring in the state prison system that allows incarcerated people to engage in lifestyle and life skill courses, college, and programming through outside organizations to become successful human beings, there is still hesitation in allowing these individuals to transition back into society earlier than expected. It should be important that everyone is aware of the incredible changes and growth of these intelligent individuals behind the walls of the prisons. The recognition of their dedication to the challenging work of change should not go unnoticed but rather let these individuals have a second chance to promote this new and improved behavior of theirs in their communities.

From my own experiences, I can say that years of trauma led to me developing a substance use disorder that took over my life, and resulted in me being sentenced to prison. This incarceration not only affected my life but others that were known to me and unknown to me. I have three amazing children who I needed not only to be there physically for but mentally as well, so while being incarcerated at the Maine Correctional Center I went above and beyond to change my life around. I engaged in all classes to help me learn coping skills for addiction, worked on my wellness daily, pursued my education at UMA in the Mental Health and Human Services program as well as earned over 30 certificates. I was recently released from the Southern Maine Women's Reentry Center on Supervised Community Confinement Program. Since being released I have had the opportunity to interact with influential people in the community who have been very welcoming and are allowing me the chance to build a career for myself without any judgment. I have been working on re-establishing family relationships and building new positive and supportive relationships in the community, which is motivation alone in continuing to be the best version of myself. I strive each day to make my children proud of me and show them through my actions that someone's mistakes do not define them, but it's the choice of making a change due to those mistakes that define the person. I am grateful for the opportunity that I have been given through the early release program and I believe so many other individuals have displayed the same extreme changes within themselves and have had major achievements while being in prison. With that being said, they should have the chance to receive early release. The requirements for SCCP include anyone over the amount of 5 years to do  $\frac{2}{3}$  of their time, which is not beneficial for any "resident" with an extensive sentence time to serve. But having parole could and would make that possible for them to obtain early release while being under the supervision of probation in the community.

Not allowing parole back into Maine negates opportunities for great accomplishments to happen for our citizens. I support restoring parole and will continue to use my voice in speaking about this very topic to all in the state of Maine.

Sincerely,  
Danielle Ward  
Camden, Maine