



**Testimony of the
Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal
Populations**

In Support of LD 178,

“An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community”

Monday, March 13, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is Bruce King, I live in Brunswick, and I am Co-Executive Director of Maine Inside Out, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a movement for transformative justice, in which communities acknowledge and attend to the social, structural and systemic roots of crime and harm. Today, I am representing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations as a Commissioner representing a historically disadvantaged racial population of the state.

I am honored to offer testimony in support of LD 178, “An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community.” We extend deep gratitude to Sen. Beebe-Center for introducing this bill.

The truth is Maine people know what keeps us safe. It’s living in communities where across race, place, and genders we have the resources to be well, overcome our challenges, and find redemption for our mistakes. But today, our criminal legal system emphasizes punishment over rehabilitation and doesn’t match those Maine values. Separating families and locking away loved ones is a choice we don’t need to keep making. The question of reinstating parole asks us to imagine a world where people aren’t endlessly punished for mistakes but offered a way to address harms and heal.

As a member of the Permanent Commission and an historically disadvantaged population, it is important that I point out that over-incarceration is an issue that disproportionately impacts Black and African American, Indigenous, and Latino populations.¹ Black and Indigenous people sentenced to prison in Maine without a split of probation time have fewer prior convictions than white people with straight sentences. Black people make up one percent of Maine’s population, but constitute eleven percent of the state’s prison population and five percent of the state’s

¹ Vera Institute. Incarceration Trends in Maine. 2019.

<https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-maine.pdf>

probation population.² The reasons behind these disparities, of course, are complex and varied, but the result is longer sentences of incarceration, fewer opportunities to reintegrate into their families and communities, and poorer outcomes for people of color.

Victims of crime are also being underserved in our current system. In a national survey, 7 in 10 victims of crimes reported experiencing at least one symptom of trauma but 74 percent did not receive counseling or other mental health support to help recover and 87 percent received no financial or economic assistance to seek that help.³

These numbers tell us that the current system is broken not only for incarcerated people, but for victims as well. We have an opportunity to rewrite the rules and focus Maine's resources on a system that supports both healing and reform. Estimated savings based on the cost of implementing a parole system compared to the cost of incarceration amounts to \$5 million dollars annually.⁴ If we work together, we can make sure those dollars go toward making this a place where people get the support we need to heal and keep our lives on the best track, provide equal justice, and shape our future into all we imagine it can be.

² The Council of State Governments Justice Center. Justice Reinvestment in Maine. 2019.

https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ME-Third-Presentation_12.11.19_FINAL.pdf

³ Alliance for Safety and Justice. Crime Survivors Speak. 2022

<https://allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Alliance-for-Safety-and-Justice-Crime-Survivors-Speak-September-2022.pdf>

⁴ Bring Back Parole: A Guide to LD 178. 2023.

https://parole4me.com/wp-content/uploads/Bring-Back-Parole-Guide_022622_final.pdf