

Michael Schaab
Rural Action Group Against Racism (RAGAR)
LD 178

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

My name is Michael Schaab and I live in Monroe. I would like to offer my full support for LD 178. I have a son who incarcerated in Maine in his early 20's, followed by probation. Both his time in prison and time on probation were very difficult times for him and the rest of our family. These were years where his personal growth was very difficult. It was not easy for him to learn responsibility, organization, time and money management, or community obligations. He did not have a chance to practice and hone many of the adult skills that normally accompany this time in a person's life. He is one of the fortunate ones who did turn his life around and has not re-offended, but I can unequivocally state, 20 years later he still struggles with many aspects of life that most of take in stride.

But my support for this bill goes much further and much deeper than his story. It is about racial justice. Knowing that many inmates of color are disproportionately detained in prison, one can't help but see this as a consequence of the system that disfavors people of color. Allowing these people, treated unjustly, another opportunity in a hopefully more just society would help mitigate some of the past wrongs done by this system. It is also about giving people who made mistakes when they were young another chance to avoid repeating their errors and become successful community members. We were all young and I would guess that we all made some serious mistakes and managed to become productive members of our society – we just didn't get caught!

This is about recognizing that the policies instituted with the 'War on Drugs' and 'Tough on Crime', though perhaps well intentioned, are failures. These led to mass incarcerations, overfull prisons, prisons for profit, little or no resources for rehabilitation, and facilities that cannot contribute nearly enough to treat mental illness, substance abuse, or homelessness – the root causes of many arrests and sentences.

This is about public safety. Nationally, people placed on parole are much less likely to re-offend. Since granting of parole will be overseen by the DOC, inmates not deemed 'safe' to their communities would not be granted parole. On the opposite side, those who are placed on parole under supervision are given meaningful opportunities to make significant contributions to their communities.

This is a way to amend some of the harm we have done, give people the opportunity to grow and contribute, and allow the DOC some room to make meaningful changes that can address the challenges of inmates and prison personnel since there will be fewer incarcerated persons. This is all about Criminal Justice and Public Safety. Please support it.

Thank you for the all the work you do to support the people of Maine.

Very Sincerely,
Michael Schaab