

LD178

Testimony of Vincent Clark

Resident of Westbrook Maine

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

My name is Vincent Clark, and I am here to testify in support of LD 178, an Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration by reinstating parole in Maine. My son, Steven Clark, has been incarcerated for 18 years and has shown a remarkable transformation during his time in prison. I have attended two of his three graduations. He has earned two Bachelor's degrees, an Associate's degree, a Master's degree, and is now pursuing a Ph.D.

My son has worked to change his life and has got involved with everything he can at the prison. Steven has sent me his certifications from University of Maine. My son is certified Substance Abuse Technician and a certified Mental Health Technician. He also sent me his meditation, yoga, and recovery coach certifications that I share with everyone. Steven has used his time to the best of his ability and it is now time to give him another chance at life. My son has accomplished all of this when parole was not even an option; he has done all of this because he has taken responsibility for the choices that put him in prison. Again, it is time to give Steven and other men like him at Maine State Prison another chance.

I run a recovery/reentry house in Westbrook called the Transformation Project and I am active in the Maine Recovery Community. I have met close to a hundred men here in the Portland/Westbrook community at recovery meetings that my son has worked with at the Maine State Prison. Steven has done a significant job at bettering himself and at transforming his life around. Every week I meet someone new that my son has helped or worked with.

I have been to the prison for hospice events where I have met men like Leo Hylton, Brandon Brown, and Bobby Payzant who recently passed away. I was able to see the good work of Shaun Libby and meet several other good people at the college graduations at the prison. While Brandon is now out, Steven, Leo, Shaun and many others who are on the inside walking a similar path deserve another chance. These are good men who did a bad thing. Their pain and traumas created more pain and trauma. They should not be defined by their worst moment; we should see and honor the men they have become by allowing them to be released. Our communities need these men to help with many of the social issues that are plaguing us.

My son's actions in 2006 were that of a young man who was under the influence of alcohol and drugs. He is not that same person. 18 years has been enough time for him to transform his life which he has done. Serving any more time is only a waste of taxpayers' dollars and a waste of my son's life. Parole would give him a chance at putting all of his education in use in society.

As a father, I could not be more proud of my son's achievements despite his circumstances. However, it has been incredibly difficult for me and my family to see him behind bars for so many years. We have missed birthdays, holidays, and other significant life events that we would have shared together as a family. The emotional toll of having a loved one incarcerated is immense, and it is one that affects not only the person behind bars but also their families and loved ones.

I believe that reinstating parole in Maine would provide hope and opportunities for incarcerated individuals like my son to be reunited with their families and contribute to their communities. Research shows that parole can reduce recidivism rates, improve public safety, and save taxpayers' money by reducing the cost of incarceration (The Sentencing Project, 2019). Furthermore, parole can provide incentives for incarcerated individuals to engage in rehabilitation and education programs, leading to positive outcomes upon release. While Steven had the intrinsic motivation to go to school, parole would inspire many people to get involved with programming and rehabilitative programs.

I pray you will see the heart of these men and see they are redeemable. I respectfully ask you to support LD 178 and give my son and the other men at the prison like Leo Hylton, Shaun Libby, and others a second chance at life outside of prison. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Vincent Clark