

Dayla Ramsey  
Louisburg, KS  
LD 178

Greetings, my name is Dayla Ramsey, and I am here today to speak in support of LD 178 An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community. I am a resident of the State of Kansas and concerned American citizen and prison abolitionist that seeks healing and compassion for all. I believe this legislation is long overdue and necessary for the health of the State of Maine, and its communities.

I believe it is a fair assumption that we all hope to be treated humanely and with the dignity inherent to our humanity. Incarceration in the U.S. is an intentionally traumatizing and monetized punishment, that increasingly costs taxpayers more money without a return on investment. At a basic level, not reintegrating incarcerated humans back into community fails to meet a reasonable threshold of success that justifies the expense. Justice is nuanced and complicated, but we all desire it, and it is not the absence of justice in the U.S. that exacerbates violence, but the lack of compassion, support, and access to resources and hope.

Often when people encounter challenges in life the coping mechanisms we are taught, or lack thereof, determine the trajectory of not just an individual, but also of other peoples' lives.

These skills are part of our collective responsibility that can and must be taught in the communities and carceral spaces if we hope to have safe communities.

While attending George Mason, I befriended a colleague, Leo Hylton and we built a friendship while attending class and working on projects. We both believe in the healing power of compassion and love, and the profound impact brave, compassionate spaces have in building community. We know firsthand how compassionate spaces coupled with a supportive community can facilitate healing to those harmed and those who have done harm. This legislation does not excuse the harm done or give a 'free pass' to individuals in attempt to assuage our collective guilt; it is rather an opportunity to reimagine our communities by asking the most important and fundamental question a human being must ask oneself: what if?

Despite the Puritanical roots that are often invoked when unpackaging why we do the things we do, particularly in regard to incarceration, it is a convenient and often lazy response to assume that someone does harm because they are inherently bad or evil. That oversimplification at best is reductive and belies the darker truths we have yet to confront because it lacks the requisite grace and compassion necessary to restore humanity, hope, and rebuild communities that reconnect us.

I understand the hesitation that people have with labels, specifically formerly incarcerated, because it signals how one is to behave and treat the people; conversely, it also lacks the imagination and complication inherent to being human. It is difficult for a label to encompass the totality of a human being and their lived experiences. Enabling individuals to have hope is a key component of rebuilding community, restoring humanity, and building safer communities that engage in positive conflict resolution, mediation, and connection, vice isolation, escalation, and fear.

As human beings we always hope that we are more than the sum of our parts or our worst deed. I will close with a final question I believe supports the argument for parole: What would the world look like if we extended grace, facilitated healing, mediated difficult challenges with compassion, and treated each other in a way that restored compassion and humanity?

Thank you for your time and consideration.