

Erica King  
Portland  
LD 178

March 12, 2023

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

My name is Erica King, and I am a resident of Portland. My career has focused on improving safety and wellbeing within our justice system in Maine and nationally. My testimony today is informed by friends and family working within the current system, and by my work with currently and formerly incarcerated people who make amends for their wrongs and contribute to the greater good of society every day. Across the aisles and across the lines, we all agree on one thing: this system needs changing. LD178 is one low risk change Maine can make, consistent with the 43 other states who already operate a parole system. I am writing to you today to show my support for LD 178 and the effort to re-establish parole in Maine to bring us into statutory alignment with the rest of the country.

I support this bill because I believe in the accountability and rehabilitation goals of the current system. Parole is one statutory mechanism most states already have to deliver justice. Why wouldn't we want those provisions available in our Maine statute? I support this bill because virtually all Mainers I talk to believe parole already exists in Maine. For years, Maine justice leaders have been trying to create partial fixes and incremental workarounds for Maine's lack of a parole system. One commendable example is Maine DOC's supervised community confinement program, which offers promising local evidence of the promise of community supervision. Parole could deliver the expanded cost savings Maine taxpayers deserve by taking community supervision to scale. Given shortages in the current correctional workforce and the high costs of incarcerations, many aging, long term residents could safely be supervised in community with better fiscal stewardship of current taxpayer resources.

I support this bill because I believe in fairness and equality. We hope this bill offers correction for prior, known and well documented discrepancies and racially unjust sentences. I support this bill because victims and crime survivors deserve better outcomes from a system that is long on taxpayer expenses and short on delivering on the promise of rehabilitation. Maine's parole system would restrict anyone truly dangerous from receiving it. Parole is not a 'get out of jail free card' for those who have not earned the opportunity and could provide more support to victims and survivors than the current system allows. In a system with multiple on ramps, parole simply provides one legal mechanism of an offramp for those who choose to take a rehabilitative path.

I support this bill because parole would increase our public safety and lower criminal justice costs. Our current system is burdensome to taxpayers. Taxpayers cannot afford the willful ignorance of a purely retributive system that is tough on crime, but not smart. I support this bill because the arguments against having parole in Maine are grounded in fear in a moment where Maine needs the courage that justice requires. I believe in this legislative body to make the historic and important policy decision to create a discretionary parole system in Maine, through your support of LD 178.

With gratitude for your public service,

Erica King, Portland, Maine