

## The Episcopal Church in Maine

Loring House  
143 State Street  
Portland, ME 04101-3701  
207-772-1953 [www.episcopalmaine.org](http://www.episcopalmaine.org)

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Senator Pinny H. Beebe-Center, Chair  
Representative Suzanne Salisbury, Chair  
Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety  
State House, Room 436  
Augusta, Maine 04333

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and Members of the Criminal Justice Committee, my name is John Hennessy and I represent the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. Today, I am offering testimony in **support** of LD 178 – An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration to the Community.

Successful re-entry into society is one of the most challenging parts of rehabilitation and an area where The Episcopal Church has voiced particular concern. When re-entering their communities, former offenders find themselves needing to reconnect with family and friends, find employment and housing while having a criminal record, and adjust to life outside of prison. Not everyone is able to make the readjustment successfully, and numerous entities, including government, NGOs, and religious organizations, are investing in strategies to provide services to help offenders and to prevent recidivism.

A number of faith-based groups are involved in supporting prisoner re-entry by offering programs and resources to those who are still incarcerated. Within The Episcopal Church, the [Diocese of Florida](#) has scaled their work in response to the growth of prisons and helped create the ecumenical [Kairos Prison Ministry](#) program which has spread across the Church. In addition to fulfilling our obligation to care and minister to people in all places, prison ministries help engage and support people in their rehabilitation and ease the challenges of re-entry.

Currently, there are [three ways](#) that prisoners can leave prison and re-enter their communities. The first consists of formal government supervision in the form of probation or parole. In 2016, there were 4.5 million Americans living under supervised probation or parole. The second consists of individuals voluntarily seeking admittance to government or community-based programs that prepare them for re-entry and provide them with support services when they return to their communities. Finally, other offenders are released without any form of government supervision or transition support.

Successful re-entry is often contingent on a [number of factors](#), both before and after the offender is released from prison. Programming within prisons helps those who are incarcerated to adjust when they leave, in particular addressing substance abuse or mental health concerns, as well as building and developing skills. Upon re-entry, an individual's success requires some basic supports such as employment, a home, transition of physical and mental healthcare, and having the skills or education necessary to advance in life. One way to help those formerly incarcerated find jobs is to [ban the box](#) on job applications asking if the applicant has spent time in prison.

Some notable re-entry programs have drastically lowered the recidivism rate of the offenders who graduate from them and have helped them create a new life.

- The [Hope for Prisoners](#) program, based out of Las Vegas, is an 18-month long curriculum that provides prevocational programs, assistance in job placement, and extensive mentoring. This program's mentoring is especially important, as many mentors are active duty Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department officers. During a University of Las Vegas [18-month study](#), 64% of program participants found stable employment and only 6% were re-incarcerated.
- The [Prison Entrepreneurship Program](#) starts while in prison where offenders can receive a mini-MBA, focusing on character, leadership, and business. Once released, participants are provided transitional housing, employment assistance, counseling, and other support services. This program has had over [2,300 graduates](#) who have founded over 360 small businesses. Remarkably, 100% of the program's graduates are employed within 90 days of their release from prison, and the recidivism rate is 7% over three years.
- The [Harlem Re-entry Initiative](#), started by the J.C. Flowers Foundation, supports and partners with local community organizations assisting parolees in Manhattan. The initiative now supports two organizations, Circle of Support and Network in the Community, with partners like the [Interfaith Center in New York](#) to provide parolees with the necessary support to successfully re-enter society. Volunteers accompany parolees home from prison, provide job-readiness training and other life coaching, organize community gatherings and family support groups, and connect parolees and their families to community services.

The Episcopal Church has long advocated for both church and government support for prisoner re-entry programs. In [1994](#), parishes were encouraged to establish relationships with offenders and to support them after their release from prison until they could become self-sufficient in society. This mission was expanded in a [2012 resolution](#), which stated that The Episcopal Church is firmly committed to a system that provides prisoners with assistance before and after their time in prison, including programs that provide job training and education.

In May 2007, the Executive Council approved [Support for Prisoner Re-entry Programs](#), calling on Episcopalians to contact their Members of Congress and other elected officials to support re-entry programs for incarcerated and recently released people. Raising awareness on this issue,

The Episcopal Public Policy Network advocated for the [Second Chance Act of 2007](#), signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2008. This Act was designed to improve existing programs to reduce recidivism rates, create new and innovative programs meant to improve offender re-entry services, promote drug treatment and mentoring of offenders, and conduct research on re-entry.

Expanding effective re-entry programs across the country would have a dramatic effect on the people working to build new lives and their communities. Providing support and employment to these individuals greatly assists their transition into their community and affirms our faith that no person is beyond redemption and renewal.

Thank you for your attention to this important step to update supportive reentry parole by passing LD 178.