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Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher in support of
LD 178: An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of Criminal Justice and Public Safety. I am Laurie Osher and I represent District 25, the majority of Orono. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to express my support for **LD 178: An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community**.

I thank Senatore Beebe-Center for introducing LD 178, and for offering me the opportunity to co-sponsor it. The bill, presented as a concept draft, proposes to reinstate parole eligibility.

Maine eradicated parole in 1976. And what was the result? prison sentences in Maine doubled and the incarceration rate of women grew fifteen-fold. While the crime rate remained the same between 1979 and 1994, the prison population in Maine grew by 90%.

We like to say that Maine leads, but in some cases we lead in ways that are embarrassing.

Maine leads in the rate of incarceration: According to the Prison Policy Initiative, Maine has an incarceration rate of 328 per 100,000 people, locking up a higher percentage of its total population than almost every other democracy on Earth. Since it is likely that Maine citizens are no more terrible than citizens elsewhere, it appears that our state over-incarcerates people.

Incarcerating people is expensive, so this pattern of over-incarceration isn't wise fiscal policy. It costs taxpayers approximately \$76,000 a year to incarcerate one prisoner. Putting that same person on parole would cost the State around \$8,000 annually. That's a savings of 90% on the cost. The economics clearly favor parole.

If Maine were to reinstate a parole system, a parole board (a panel of qualified people) would decide who should be released on parole. Those convicted would still need to serve at least a minimum portion of their sentence as prescribed by the sentencing judge. And why parole? Because it enables the transition of rehabilitated individuals to community reintegration.

Parole enables people who have made mistakes and been imprisoned for them the opportunity to be released after rehabilitation so that they can become productive members of our communities. A vote of Ought To Pass on **LD 178: An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community**, is a vote in support of reducing the number of people incarcerated in Maine, a fiscally responsible vote to reduce costs, and a vote to improve Maine communities.