

Parole Testimony

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

I am writing to show my unwavering support for LD-178

My name is Shaun Libby and I have been incarcerated at the Maine State Prison since I was 18 years old. I am just a few weeks away from completing my 25th year of incarceration. I got in my fair share of trouble in my youth, and, like most young people, I never addressed any of those issues. This led me to make a series of horrible decisions that culminated in me committing a robbery and accidentally taking a man's life during that robbery shortly after turning 18. I did not mean for that to happen, nor did I want it to happen, but that does not change the outcome one bit.

I was sentenced to 40 years in prison at 20 years old and felt like my life was over. It was because of other older prisoners who pulled me in and encouraged me to focus on the positives and find meaning in my life that I did not go down the wrong path early in my sentence. Because of their encouragement, and the encouragement of my family, I have gone on to do many things that I can say I am extremely proud of. I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree from UMA in the Science of Mental Health and Human Services, I am currently enrolled in a Master's Degree program in Youth Development at Michigan State University, I co-developed and co-facilitate a mentor-style program where incarcerated and previously incarcerated individuals work with incarcerated youth, I am a certified Literacy Volunteer who has tutored many men and helped them achieve their GED/HiSET, I am a Certified Recovery Coach who has worked one-on-one with men struggling with addiction, I am a peer mentor in the Intensive Mental Health Unit, I have trained 18 shelter dogs for adoption, I sit on a Restorative Justice Steering Committee with other residents and prison staff working collaboratively to bring Restorative Practices to the prison environment, I have co-developed and facilitated a Restorative Justice Basics course to other residents, I currently volunteer in an advisory role to the Restorative Justice Project of Maine, I have facilitated a reentry course to residents preparing for release, and I was an Executive Board member of the prison branch of the NAACP for many years among other things.

I think it is easy to look at my accomplishments and say that I could be considered an exception to the rule when it comes to what many people think about prisoners. However, I would argue that I am far closer to the rule than to the exception. You see, there are hundreds of prisoners throughout the Maine Department of Corrections who are enrolled in college, vocational programming, and other positive programming for the sole purpose of learning why they did what they did and to ensure that those behaviors do not happen again so that they may become productive members of society. Another thing that so many men and women throughout MDOC facilities do on a daily basis is volunteer in a multitude of ways to help out their communities both inside and outside the prison walls. This has been my experience throughout my 25 years of incarceration. This is not a new phenomenon or because people are trying to look good just in case parole is reinstated. So many people want to address the harm they have caused, and

because our current system does not allow for them to do this directly to those they have harmed, they look for ways to better themselves and help others in order to show that they are indeed better than their worst mistakes.

Harm is something that is a constant in the lives of the majority of people in prison, it has enveloped them and been an incessant companion through much of their lives. There is a saying, hurt people hurt people. Many people in prison have suffered unspeakable harm throughout their lives and have never been able to address it, and, because of that, many have inflicted harm on others. Unfortunately, for so many of these individuals it took coming to prison to finally address the harm done to them, and LD-178 allows for those they have harmed to address the harm done to them. There are mechanisms built into LD-178 that allows for victims to have far greater ability to speak their truth and address the individual that harmed them than ever before in the Maine Criminal Justice System.

As I stated earlier, I took a man's life during a robbery. That man was a father, a husband, a son, a brother, an uncle, a cousin, a friend and so much more. Every person that was impacted by my actions, and continues to be impacted by them, has every right to think that I deserve to rot in prison for what I did. They may not think I deserve to be paroled or to ever see freedom again. However, under our current system, I will walk out of prison in the not-too-distant future with no input from them. LD-178 centers the voices of those impacted by crime and would allow those for whom I have done irreparable harm to have input in the process, as they should.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and consider my words and the words of so many others whether in favor or in opposition to this important piece of legislation. I implore you to vote in favor of LD-178