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LD 1633

To the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee:

My name is Jeff Taylor & I am the Maine State Prison (MSP) NAACP Vice-President. I am speaking in favor of LD 1633; An Act To Establish A Community-Based Reentry Program In All Department of Corrections Facilities. First & foremost, criminal justice reform has been at the forefront of this committee for the past approximately 10 years! For the past 13 years I have been providing peer support here at the MSP. After growing up in a household where my mother, brother & I were beaten practically every single day for some reason my dad deemed it was necessary for! For my entire life, I had no one I could share those nightmares with. Why? In fear of being laughed at. I was hanging out with an adult man; he drove a small pick-up truck with a cap on it and it had an alarm system company logo on the door. We were at his parents' house, and he was showing me the alarm system he installed. We then were hanging out in a tag a long camper and he attempted to molest me! I pushed from him and landed on the camper bed and felt a gun under the pillow. I pointed the gun at him, mind you, I am about 10-11 years old. He froze and I told him I would shoot him if he moved. I backed out of the trailer and ran as fast as I could all the way home. It was a long way from my house! I finally got home, and both my mother & father was there, I told them both and my mother hugged me while my father told me to stop lying, I could get someone in serious trouble for that! I was really shocked to hear him say that. This is the person who is supposed to be protecting me! I literally had no one I could go to. I thought, if my own family would not support me, who would? Shortly after, I was introduced to smoking Pot & drinking Alcohol! It made me laugh; I was happy. It riden my "nightmares" that I constantly had almost every waking night & day! That was it! I found a way to feel better about myself, Pott & Alcohol! Is this the way a 10-11-year-old should be thinking? Fast forward from 1990 to 1997, now living in Maine, I was in a serious ATV accident. I was in a coma for 28 days & suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) & one of the results of being in a coma was I did not dream. At the time, it was a blessing! The other result was not remembering much of my childhood. My time of incarceration in prison began December of 1999. Since then, I have been in & out of prison consistently with the objective of succeeding all three times I was released from prison! The Maine Department of Corrections (MDOC) has every intention to help us succeed in life when we are released. Nearly all of them cannot relate to what an individual needs in order to be a better version of who they were when they came to prison. Everyone seems to have their own idea on how to help someone. The MDOC caseworkers will ask an individual a series of questions that comes from a Level of Service Inventory -Revised (LSI-R) tool designed to score our risk of re-offending. This tool is not the right one. The one used focus on if an individual is in the community versus the individual specifically! Please, I encourage you all to check out the difference between MDOC & the one the Federal Government uses under the (First Step Act). Also, it's only use is upon intake due to the fee requested for every use! In my opinion, to be SURE decisions are being made accurately, the tool NEEDS to be used when re-classified! Since when does a footnote dictate public safety. By not accurately scoring someone, it can be a risk to public safety. This bill provides an opportunity for individuals like my-self to pay it forward! Someone who understands the hidden or not easily recognized dangers or difficulties of MDOC, as well as our own! We call them (Pitfalls). Peer Support with lived experience can identify the pitfalls on all sides as well as the (Stinking Thinking) that is a thought process everyone incarcerated can relate to! Having approximately 25 years' of lived experience of incarceration as well as recidivating gave me the knowledge in this field as a professional. It was no easy task to figure out that I am responsible for my mistakes. It took about 12 years of recidivating, in & out of prison to get it. Not everyone does get it! The question I continually ask myself is why did it take so long for me to get it? There isn't enough space on this paper or time to explain it properly

to you all. With that said, Restorative Justice (RJ) which is who I learned about from a magazine in 2010! I still have the magazine today. RJ helped me to see through my excuses used to behave in the way I was. I had to figure it out the hard way! It is the only way to figure it out because simply put, MDOC has NO ONE to help who has lived experience. The day I owned my behavior is the day my life changed forever. The emotionless person I was became a very emotional person; I cry all the time! I am not embarrassed to express myself. This bill will provide a vehicle for everyone who is incarcerated to be able to address the behavior(s) that caused the crime(s) to happen. Addressing the crime first is wrong! How do I know this, because I could never understand truly why I behaved the way I did. Most everyone who becomes incarcerated is in some type of denial! There are hidden feelings pushed down with substance use period. How do I know, I did it! Lived experience. If you want to truly help us, you will take the couple of minutes to think about this important subject and help us help others! March of this year the NAACP Executive Board took the Certified Intensive Peer Support Specialist (CIPSS) training, passed the test and we are currently helping our peers to help themselves! The only way a person can be better is to first understand themselves! It is not an easy task to complete. We understand how to help each other. This bill will provide the opportunity for others who are willing to take the step towards finding who they truly are! This bill will truthfully reduce the likeliness of a person returning to prison. Developing a working relationship with someone who can relate to our struggles in life will help motivate me to change verses being asked a series of questions from a book by a stranger who may not care whether I change my life for the better. I don't mean to keep repeating myself, but it is very important to understand that someone who can relate to my struggles, someone with lived experience is invested in helping me and at the same time, it helps them! For these reasons, I hope you will provide a vehicle for us to help each other!