

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



March 31, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Jan Collins, I am Assistant Director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC) an organization committed to ethical, positive, and humane changes in Maine's prison system.

I am here in support of [LD 1335](#) An Act to Prohibit Life Sentences sponsored by Rep Milliken.

I am a survivor of, and have lost a family member to domestic violence. I am also a survivor of sexual assault. I stand with the majority of survivors who by a three-to-one margin, believe that the most effective way to reduce crime is to create more jobs and housing instead of long sentences.¹

In 1870, the National Prison Association asserted in its *Declaration of Principles* "The supreme aim of prison discipline is the reformation of criminals, not the infliction of vindictive suffering." A paper delivered by the Superintendent of Detroit's jail, Zebulon Brockaway, stated "A prison term too long meant the justice system lost its claim on being just, and those inside who were already "cured" became disenchanting and desperate. Brockaway proposed a point system in which a persons behavior would allow them to graduate. There would be clear incentives for someone to behave and take classes and better themselves. Upon release they would remain on some form of state supervision for a period of time. ⁴ The model took off and came to be known as parole.

This model gave prisoners three essentials - hope, incentive and a pathway to success.

In 1976, Maine took away those incentives from anyone sentenced after that date. The hundreds of people sentenced before 1976 continued to come before the parole board. The board is still in existence although less than a dozen people are under its supervision. Never heard of it? Didn't know it existed? That is because it has been working smoothly for these 50 years.

Maine regularly ranks as one of the safest states in the country.⁵ But, without the ability for people convicted after 1976 to qualify for parole, we have ballooned our prison population from 671 in 1980⁶ to 1824 in 2024 an increase of 272%. The states population increase over the same period is 20%.⁸ That means the prison population increased over 13 times faster than the states population.

Each one of those individuals who would have qualified for parole is costing the state anywhere from \$87,000 - \$117,000 per year (depending on what source you consult).. Over the period of a decade, one individual who would have been eligible for parole can cost taxpayers a million dollars. That is just one person.

Not having parole robs the community of the labor, taxes, and services of that individual. It robs their family of the financial support he or she would have provided on the outside, and it robs his or her children of a parent.

Because tax dollars are being spent on keeping individuals way beyond the time needed for rehabilitation, money that would have been better spent on the services that protect people from incarceration i.e. education, job training, and health care are instead spent on prison infrastructure, corrections officers and cement.

Meanwhile the MDOC reports that the average age of Maine's inmates is increasing year over year. The Department has opened an "Assisted Living Unit" at Mt View Correctional Facility and has a hospice unit at Maine State Prison. We have MDOC residents with dementia, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, residents in wheel chairs or carrying canes, and residents unable to carry out the tasks of daily living. These individuals are well beyond any threat to community safety. Yet, they must be transported to outside medical appointments in shackles, accompanied by at least two officers.

I ask that you give LD 1335 your full support, but add a provision that would allow for all residents to apply for Supervised Community Confinement after 15 years.

Thank-you for your consideration.

Jan

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1 Crime Survivors Speak 2024: A National Survey of Victims' Views on Safety and Justice. Alliance for Safety and Justice and Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice. 2024. <https://asj.allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/CrimeSurvivorsSpeak2024.pdf>

2 Mauer, Marc and Nellis, Ashley. *The Meaning of Life: The Case for Abolishing Life Sentences*. The New Press. New York. 2018. p.3

One of every seven people in prison in the United States- a total of more than Two hundred thousand people- is currently serving a life prison term, more than the entire prison population in 1972, before the advent of mass incarceration...its use exerts and upward pressure on sentencing for all offenses.”²

3 Ibid. p.25

Prior to 1970, only 7 states had LWOP, Maine did not until 1976.3

4 Austen, Ben. *Parole, Prison, and the Possibility of Change*. Flatiron Books, New York, NY. 2023.p 13-14.

There are three types of life sentences - Life Without the Possibility of Parole(LWOP) (also called Death by Imprisonment), life with the possibility of parole, and virtual life(terms of at least 50 years).People with a virtual life sentence often die in prison.

5 World Population Review. *Safest States in the US*.

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/safest-states#:~:text=Maine%20has%20the%20lowest%20number,the%20lowest%20in%20the%20country.>

6 Growth in Mass Incarceration. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/research/>

7 2024 MDOC Year End Adult Data Report.pdf https://www.maine.gov/corrections/sites/maine.gov.corrections/files/inline-files/2024%20Year%20End%20-%20Adult%20data%20report_0.pdf p. 3

8 Rector, Amanda. Demographic Trends in Maine. Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services. https://www.maine.gov/dafs/economist/sites/maine.gov.dafs.economist/files/releases/092424_AGA.pdf