



Restorative Justice Project Maine

Distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety committees,

My name is Norman Hightower. I am a justice impacted individual and I am writing on behalf of Restorative Justice Project Maine in support of LD 421, an act to prevent reentry barriers into the community after incarceration by repealing certain driver's license suspension provisions.

I myself have recently reentered society after a period of incarceration and am doing so with a revoked driver's license. I am currently employed by Restorative Justice Project Maine so I am fortunate to have an employer who is understanding of my situation and does not hold my lack of driving privileges against me. I am also fortunate to have supportive people in my life who are willing to help me get to work, to doctor's appointments, and to run simple everyday tasks like grocery shopping. Not everyone getting out of prison has these luxuries. Some people's ability to gain employment is based on whether or not they have a driver's license. Newly reentered individuals are often on probation, so they're required to have a job. It is very difficult to get and keep a job in Maine (especially rural Maine where there is no public transportation) if a person does not have their license. I know all of this because despite having all of the support I've previously mentioned, it's still difficult for me to get to work events, conventions and meetings. Having to provide transportation for me is also stressful for my family and coworkers, which takes a toll on our relationships. Being able to legally drive a vehicle or not could be the difference as to whether or not a person reoffends. It certainly will make a difference in the type of employment the person is eligible for. It also could possibly make a difference in a person's relationship with their children if they don't have transportation and cannot get to see their kids as often. All of these things can have far reaching effects. Effects that stem from simply not having a driver's license.

I know from my own personal experience how hard it is to become a productive member of society after getting out of prison. I need a lot of things to go right if I plan on staying out of prison, and even more things to go right if I plan on being a productive member of society. Not having my license puts me at a severe disadvantage. I hope we decide that we want to give people reentering society as many advantages as possible to help them become productive members of that society. Removing this particular barrier would certainly be a step in the right direction. Thank you for your careful consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Norman Hightower

Restorative Justice Project Maine

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