

Good afternoon, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Brad Chesnel. I entered the Maine State Prison at the age of 24 and have now spent 28 years in prison. I am the Chair of the Long-Timers' Group at the Maine State Prison. I am testifying on behalf of myself and the men in that group in Support of LD 648.

I am 52 years old. I was 23 when I committed the crime for which I am incarcerated. Belonging to the Long Timers' group is optional, and there is only one requirement. Your sentence must be longer than 10 years. For many, like me, the sentence is much longer. We are a group of about 130 men. We work to support each other and share ideas about how to improve our lives. I help to organize meetings and discussions. The passage of this bill could mean a great deal to me, to the men I represent and to many others held in other Maine prisons.

First, this bill offers hope to those who were immature when we committed our crimes. There is not a day that I do not regret the actions that brought me here, yet that regret cannot change the past for me or anyone else. Many of us strive every day to be more than the worst thing we have ever done. I am one of those.

I did make a choice to become a different man from the angry 23-year-old youth I was in 1997. That 23-year-old could never have written this testimony. Over many years I built a portfolio of programs completed and skills gained—a two-inch-thick testament to my transformation. I have participated in efforts to improve myself (anger management and college courses), things to connect me with my family (parenting courses), and I have led programs to help my fellow prisoners. But under the current structure, that portfolio will never be more than a collection of pages in a folder, because there is no avenue to present evidence of growth and transformation.

LD 648 also offers something positive for the Department of Corrections (DOC), which has a big investment in rehabilitation. The simple possibility of proving to be ready for a different life, however remote, will encourage the collaboration of staff and prisoners to work effectively on rehabilitation. The DOC does not tell us to take classes, better ourselves, or prepare for reentry. They require only this: a bed made, a count light on, and an ID for a meal. That is the standard. This bill could change that.

Next, and perhaps most important, LD 648 offers something very important for communities, a healthier and better prepared person, who can become a solid member of the community when released. While I understand that some members of this committee may believe that people must serve the sentences they were given, I must disagree on the grounds of the communities you serve. People serving long-term sentences will come home someday, because, at the end of the day, humans outlive buildings. After 50, 60, even 70 years, they will still be released. That is the reality. If we do not invest in structured reintegration, we are failing our communities. Straight releases without preparation are dangerous. At present many people are often released

directly from decades of incarceration with no transition, no remaining family, and no place to go. Maine's current approach is essentially a long time-out--just decades passing until one day, the door opens, and someone is told, "You have to go home now." That is not a plan; that is a failure. LD 648 addresses this failure by offering a phased, supervised approach to reentry.

Last, this bill offers benefits to the Maine taxpayer. This year, the cost of incarceration rose to about \$100,000 per person annually. That is a staggering investment. It is more expensive than many college educations and yet for most there is no return on the investment except for the satisfaction of a punishment completed and a frightened, unprepared person released into a community. LD 648 offers an improvement on that by preparing people for their ultimate release and reducing expenses for the few who may qualify for Supervised Community Confinement under this bill.

In summary, LD 648 is a giant step forward for those in prison, for the Department of Corrections, for many victims, for communities and for taxpayers. I thank you for your attention and hope you will provide unanimous support for LD 648.
