

Thazra-Rosie Hylton
SOUTH PORTLAND
LD 648

Good Day Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Thazra-Rosie Hylton of South Portland, and I am here in strong support of LD 648. I come before you today as the sister of a longtime resident of Maine State Prison, and as a survivor of a violent attack. From both perspectives, I feel that this bill is an important step down the path towards restorative justice in Maine, a journey that is already underway within the Department of Corrections. I have seen great changes in both my brother and MDOC in the past 17 years, and am very hopeful that this bill can help the man and the institution continue to reach their full potential.

My brother was freshly 18 when he committed his crime, which forever changed the lives of his victims family and my own. I didn't understand how the boy I knew could go down a path like that and it took a long time to process and to forgive him. We had some years of not being very close because I was so hurt by what he had done, and I was continuing to be hurt by the ongoing ripple effects of his crime that have caused pain to 3 generations of our family. We have teenagers in our family that have never met him outside of the prison visiting room. It took several years of my brother growing and gaining knowledge, lots of healing conversations, and hard work for us to reconnect and find forgiveness within our family. The man he is now is not the same person as the boy who committed his crime. I know many people educated in the topic of brain science will speak today regarding how people under the age of 26 are not fully developed and can easily make horrible decisions. I'm not highly educated on the topic but have seen it first hand.

In 2014 I was attacked and had to have emergency plastic surgery on my face. I was questioned in the hospital by the police but chose not press charges because my attacker is also a mother. I could not bring myself to turn her in because I know the pain of being separated from a loved one due to incarceration. I have met many people who have been locked up for way too long with no chance of rebuilding their lives. I didn't want to cause that for anyone else. If I felt that there was a true justice system in place that I could rely on to rehabilitate this woman instead of destroying her, I would have felt more comfortable pressing charges for what she did to me. I have scars and nerve damage on my face and head, but my heart is still full of hope and forgiveness.

LD 648 does not equate a get out of jail free card, it just creates a pathway for people to apply to serve the remainder of their sentence in the community after meeting strict criteria, including serving 15 years of their sentence. One of the many eligibility requirements is to have community support including a stable place to live and work. A showing of community support solidifies for me the fact that the community wants to welcome home these rehabilitated individuals. We simply are asking that these people are given the opportunity to prove who they are now, instead of being judged for the rest of their lives based on actions taken before they were done growing and evolving into adulthood. Thank you all for taking the time to hear my voice today. I urge you to pass this bill which will grant us some hope.