

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and Distinguished Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

I write in strong support of LD 648, an Act To Expand the Supervised Community Confinement Program. I am Professor of Anthropology at Colby College, and was very involved with the Parole bill in 2023. That effort produced a lot of research about the impact of incarceration in Maine and about how Maine compares to other states. A [report](#) by Matt Matheny of Colby College recently published on the Freedom & Captivity website reports the following (citations available in the report):

- Maine has the harshest sentencing practices in the country.
- Maine is one of only 16 states without parole.
- Maine has the sixth worst racial disparities in sentencing in the country.
- Maine is ranked last in terms of support for reentry.
- Maine is one of only four states with no pathway to release for those serving life sentences.
- Maine has the worst indigent defense system in the country.
- Maine is ranked 44th among all states for its criminal record relief.
- Maine receives an 'F' ranking from national research organizations for its compassionate release program, its misdemeanor and felony relief opportunities, and its pardons and certificates of relief.
- Maine has hardly ever granted commutation petitions, successful post-conviction appeals, or felony exonerations.
- Among New England states, Maine ranks at the top in jail admissions rate and jail pre-trial and sentenced population, and is the only New England state without parole and without a record expungement system for felonies.

This is not a good record. We can and must do better with our approach to addressing serious violence, harm, repair, and reentry. We can start with LD 648, an incrementalist bill based on the neuroscience of young adults who have committed harm. Neuroscience and social science show that the brains of young adults are not fully mature until their late 20s, and that those who have committed serious harms when they are younger hardly ever commit such harms after they have matured. A period of 15 years of incarceration – greater than the number of years recommended by the American Bar Association – is PLENTY of time for a young person to mature, take accountability, mature emotionally and psychologically, get their life in order, and return to society ready to contribute as a successful community member. Almost ALL the other states in the country offer young adults an opportunity to rehabilitate, reform, take accountability, and return to society after a shorter period of incarceration than their original sentence. Maine cannot enact second chance legislation (ie, shortening a prison sentence) without changing our state Constitution, but we can utilize the successful SCCP program to effect a similar outcome by expanding eligibility to those who committed their crimes while young who have proven themselves to be rehabilitated, mature, responsible, and ready to return to society. They would remain under the custody of the DOC, but would be living in the community to support their families, take care of their aging parents, parent their young children, finish their college degrees, and working.

Please address Maine's failing grades for our overly and unnecessarily harsh criminal justice system. This system is costing us not only wasted millions of dollars to incarcerate those who should not be incarcerated, but also the uncounted toll of wasted human lives and destroyed families. Since we know we can do better, we should.

With respect,
Catherine Besteman
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