

Testimony in Support of LD 1941

An Act to Implement Recommendations of the Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole

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

My name is Linda Small, and I am the Executive Director of Reentry Sisters, an organization dedicated to supporting women and girls impacted by incarceration throughout Maine. I am in strong support of LD 1941, which would implement the recommendations of the Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole and restore a meaningful parole process in our state.

The majority of women who are currently incarcerated with long sentences came into the carceral system during midlife. Women received and continue to receive 30, 40, or 50-plus-year sentences. These are life sentences for the women, as they will never leave prison and likely die before qualifying for the Supervised Community Confinement Program. When you enter the carceral system between the ages of 30 and 50 years old, and receive a decades-long sentence there is no hope for the Maine women, our families, or our children.

The Maine Department of Corrections has published the number of deaths in their care. In the past two years, two women died while incarcerated due to lengthy sentences. Like the women, who will die in the coming years, they died in prison but were not sentenced to life. Maine does not have the death penalty in law but in fact.

Over 95% of women enter the carceral system as victims of violence, sexual assault, and other abuse, evidenced by victim advocacy groups who come into the prison to support women who are victims of trauma, abuse, and violent crime. These long-term women survivors will serve life sentences without being sentenced to life.

A parole system is not an automatic release. It is a rigorous, evidence-based review process that evaluates rehabilitation, accountability, behavior while incarcerated, and readiness for community supervision. Those granted parole remain under supervision and must comply with conditions designed to support reintegration and reduce recidivism.

For women in Maine, many of whom are primary caregivers and survivors of trauma, abuse, and addiction, the absence of parole means no structured path to demonstrate growth, assume responsibility, and rejoin society with a support network in place. Without parole, women, who survive until their release date, are released directly from prison with little to no preparation, support, or supervision, making successful reentry exponentially harder and more costly.

LD 1941 incorporates restorative justice principles, victim-sensitive processes, and best practices from other systems that balance accountability with public safety. The bill establishes a parole board with diverse expertise, including people with lived experience, and ensures training on equitable evaluation.

Maine's current system has locked people away for decades with no opportunity for review, diminishing hope and increasing harm to families and communities. LD 1941 offers a compassionate, evidence-informed, and community-centered path forward.

On behalf of the justice-impacted women we serve, I urge the Committee to vote *ought to pass* on LD 1941 and help restore a system that recognizes change, promotes accountability, and strengthens public safety for all Mainers.

Thank you for your time and commitment to justice.

Linda Small
Portland, Maine
linda.small230@gmail.com