

Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, Representative Miliken,

My name is Arimela, and I am the fiancée of Richard Stahursky, who is serving a life sentence for a conviction in the state of Maine. I am speaking to you today from Italy, but my heart is in a prison cell thousands of miles away. I live every day with the consequences of a system that offers no hope, no review, and no recognition that people can change. Richard is the man I love. I'm here to testify in support of LD 1941. On paper Richard has an out date of December 31st 9999. The first time I read his sentencing report sheet I thought I was experiencing vision issues.

He is my future. When the state decided that his sentence would never be reviewed, it did not just condemn him to die in prison it condemned our future together to never exist. There is a unique kind of pain that comes from loving someone you may never be allowed to build a life with, no matter how much time passes or how much that person grows. In 2016, Richard was transferred from Maine to New Jersey State Prison. That transfer took him even farther away from any remaining support system, and it placed him in a facility where meaningful rehabilitation is simply not available. Despite this, Richard has not given up on himself. He wakes up every day determined to be better than he was the day before. He reflects deeply on his past, on the harm caused, and on the responsibility he carries. He wants to learn, to grow, and to prepare himself to one day be a positive, contributing member of society.

But wanting to rehabilitate yourself is not enough when the system refuses to give you the tools to do so. At New Jersey State Prison, Richard is denied access to educational programs, vocational training, and opportunities that would allow him to develop skills, insight, and accountability. He is told, implicitly and explicitly, that none of it matters because no matter what he does, he will never be considered for release. Imagine being told that your efforts, your growth, your humanity are irrelevant. That kind of hopelessness is devastating.

LD 1941 is not about automatic release. It is about restoring parole so that people like Richard can be evaluated as the people they are today not permanently defined by the worst moment of their lives. A parole hearing does not erase accountability. It does not ignore victims or minimize harm. It simply acknowledges that human beings are capable of change, and that justice should allow space to recognize that change. From where I sit, in another country, I feel the weight of this law every day. Our relationship exists through letters, short phone calls, and immense emotional effort. Maine on paper has abolished the death penalty but in reality it still does only it's rebranded under a different name: life without parole. A life sentence in Maine is a death sentence.

We cannot plan anything as simple as sharing a meal. Everything about our future is frozen because parole no longer exists in Maine for people like Richard. I ask you to consider not only the incarcerated individuals affected by this bill, but the families who love them. Life without parole does not just punish the person behind bars it extends that punishment outward, year after year, to the people who wait, who hope, and who grieve a future they are not allowed to have. Richard is asking for the chance to be seen, to be heard, and to be judged fairly based on decades of growth and reflection. Without parole, there is no incentive for rehabilitation, no acknowledgment of personal transformation, and no reason for hope.

A system without hope does not make society safer it only ensures permanent despair. LD 1941 represents compassion, fairness, and faith in rehabilitation. It restores a measure of humanity to Maine's justice system. It tells people that their lives are not over simply because they made a grave mistake, and that change matters. I am asking you, with everything I have, to support LD 1941. Please give Richard and families like ours the possibility of a future. Please allow hope, dignity, and mercy to exist alongside accountability.

Thank you for listening, and thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,
Arimela Shima