

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Alexandra Friedman and I am a student at Colby College. I write in strong support of LD 1941, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole.

Brandon Brown, a former incarcerated Mainer, captures the reality of Maine's current system in a single sentence: "Once you reach the pinnacle of growth that the system can offer you, there is no outlet for you to reenter society regardless of what you have accomplished or how you have changed." Maine's carceral system, as it stands today, prioritizes punishment over growth, accountability, and rehabilitation. While incarcerated, Mr. Brown earned his PhD, an achievement that reflects discipline and his commitment to change. However, because Maine has eliminated parole and grants clemency very rarely, even efforts of this magnitude often makes no difference. According to the most recent public records, Governor Janet Mills has granted fewer than 30 pardons and no known sentence commutations. By comparison, Oregon's governor Kate Brown pardoned over 47,000 people in 2022. This cannot be what Maine stands for: that transformation is irrelevant and second chances are unattainable.

That message stands in stark contrast with Maine's values. Our state motto, *Dirigo*, "I lead" represents independence, responsibility, and belief in human potential. Without a parole system though, many incarcerated Mainers are denied any real opportunity to live up to this ideal. Instead, they are confined for years with limited access to education, mental health care, or reentry preparation. These conditions make reintegration more difficult for incarcerated people, their families, and the broader Maine community.

The system is not only unjust, it is fiscally irresponsible. Maine spends nearly \$200 million each year on incarceration, averaging more than \$100,000 per incarcerated person annually. In fact, other students from Colby College "found that releasing 100 people onto parole would add over \$14 million to Maine's economy. Studies dating back before parole was rolled back nationwide show that the per-capita cost of supervising someone on parole is about one-tenth the cost of incarcerating that person." Parole is an economically responsible solution that addresses Maine's challenges as it funnels money into housing, education, infrastructure, and health care.

Lastly, parole will ensure greater public safety for Mainers. Parole is not just an early release, it is a smart, carefully curated, and slow release back into society. As practiced in other states, it includes wellness checks, substance use screenings, and curfews. Prison is an isolating place that often deepens trauma, shame, and disconnection. The reality looks nothing like life outside prison, and it is unreasonable to expect people to move directly from that environment into full independence without support. When individuals are released without guidance or supervision,

they are set up for failure before they even step foot outside the prison. States with parole systems consistently see lower recidivism rates because people are reintegrated in a controlled, accountable, and supportive way. Maine abolished parole in 1976 during a national wave of “tough on crime” policies, but now it is clear this approach is not moral, fiscally sound, or safe. Mainers, those incarcerated and those not, deserve better. I urge you to pass LD1941.

Thank you for your consideration.

Alexandra Friedman