

Priscilla R. Ulin, Ph.D., Damariscotta, Maine
Testimony to the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
in support of
LD178 An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community
March 13, 2023

I am a sociologist with many years of teaching and research in social and behavioral change. For the last 12 years, I have served as mentor and facilitator with the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast. I am **strongly in favor of reinstating parole in Maine** for the following reasons:

- Our criminal justice system currently focuses on punishment for the offender with little attention to the logistics of release into society. The needs of victims are largely ignored.
- A full sentence behind bars leaves little or no opportunity for rehabilitation and repair. We know that some stronger individuals engage in a kind of self-rehabilitation, reading and studying, re-thinking former behavior, re-imagining a different way of life. **Without parole, they have no way to act on their better selves.** Lack of empowerment to change can lead to depression and despair.
- Parole is not for everyone and technically is not early release. Prisoners who qualify for parole will have demonstrated high levels of healthy behavior, personal transformation, and commitment to positive social values. In other words, **they will no longer be a threat to the community.** Once paroled, they will continue to be in the custody of the criminal justice system. Failure to comply with the expectations of parole may result in return to prison.
- There is ample evidence in states with parole that **recidivism is significantly lower** after parole than it is among prisoners released directly from prison.
- A restorative justice model could provide an effective pathway for paroled offenders to return to the community. It enables victims to heal and offenders to understand the impact of the crime. A repair agreement is crafted and agreed on by all involved and submitted to the court as an alternative to court mandated punishment. **With guidance and support of a trained mentor, the parolee would complete the agreement while re-engaging with the community.**

Thank you for allowing me to testify.