

Good morning Senator Beebe-Center and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Skye Adams, and I am a resident of Portland. I am a master of social work student at the University of Maine, and I work supporting currently and formerly incarcerated students earning their postsecondary degrees through the Opportunity Scholars program.

I'm here today in support of LD 178 to restore parole to Maine because everyone deserves the right to rehabilitation, healing, and full participation in society.

After Maine abolished parole, the state's prison population rose 163% between 1983 and 2015 without any change in the crime rate. Keeping offenders incarcerated for long periods of time does nothing to keep our communities safer, and those who've committed violent crimes or served long sentences are the least likely to reoffend.

Maine currently has no clear path to re-entry, and parole offers a structured, supportive, and restorative alternative to incarceration, in which people could finish out their sentences in their communities and with their families under DOC supervision. While some currently incarcerated individuals earn "good time credit" or qualify for the Supervised Community Confinement Program, these are only good options for shorter sentences. For example, a six-year sentence could be reduced by 42%, but a 60-year sentence only by 4.2%.

Parole would also benefit Maine's economy. Even offering parole to just 10% of Maine's incarcerated population would save taxpayers \$13 million, redirecting funds to a parole board and toward restorative justice practices that protect and support victims, hold offenders accountable, and encourage healing rather than punishment.

Many of those currently incarcerated in this state are already working toward personal transformation through higher education, learning a trade, and acquiring valuable skills so they can become part of Maine's workforce. While working with incarcerated students as they complete their degrees, I have seen the transformative power of education, but without the option of parole, those with lengthy sentences may never get the chance to use their degrees or seek careers in their field. Many of my fellow students just want to give back—becoming drug and alcohol counselors helping others on the road to recovery, behavioral health professionals working with those who've also experienced trauma and abuse, and youth advocates fighting to prevent involvement with the juvenile justice system. But without the ability to complete internships, obtain licensure, or engage in professional networking, they are at a huge disadvantage.

I have worked with students from correctional facilities across Maine who are taking every opportunity for professional and personal development. These are people who were incarcerated for mistakes made when they were teenagers, as victims of intimate partner violence, or because of untreated mental illness and addiction, not because they are inherently violent or dangerous. These are some of the most talented, dedicated, and passionate people I know, and they deserve the chance to participate fully as professionals, parents, voters, and contributing members of the community.

Thank you for your work and for your support of LD 178. Let's restore parole to Maine and give everyone a second chance.