



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine
The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of LD 178 - An Act To Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community

Sponsored by Senator Beebe-Center

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Good morning, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. I am Malory Shaughnessy, a Westbrook resident, and the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. The Alliance is the statewide association representing the majority of Maine's safety net community-based mental health and substance use treatment providers. The Alliance advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

On behalf of the Alliance, I am here today to speak in support of LD 178, "An Act To Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community." As members of this committee, you are well aware that the proposed Department of Corrections budget for this biennium is close to \$500 million dollars. You also know that the Maine Department of Corrections offers numerous rehabilitative, educational, job skills, and life skills programs through which incarcerated people are earning college degrees (AA, BA, MA, MS, PhD), gaining employable skills in Industries, computer programming, youth development, agriculture, and other arenas, and learning life skills in emotional literacy, managing substance use disorder, and more.

We are investing in "correcting" our community members. We do this programming because we understand that over 90% of the people we incarcerate will return to our communities. If we believe in the mission of the DOC, "Making our communities safer by reducing harm through supportive intervention, empowering change and restoring lives," shouldn't the completion of corrections be judged by evidence of rehabilitation instead of the tolling of years?

The lack of resentencing, parole, and commutation options means incarcerated people who have gained the skills for successful and safe reentry are not allowed to return and contribute those skills to their communities prior to the conclusion of their sentences. Keeping people who are no threat to society but who, to the contrary, are able and willing to be contributing community members serves no financial, public safety, or rehabilitative purpose. Rather, the emphasis in our sentencing laws on punishment over rehabilitation and reentry hobbles the ability of MDOC to fulfill its mission of "Making our communities safer by reducing harm through supportive intervention, empowering change, and restoring lives."

Parole is far less expensive than incarceration and will reduce the exorbitant amount of taxpayer money currently spent to incarcerate **already rehabilitated** prisoners (estimated \$76,000 per prisoner per year). Further, since over 80% of incarcerated Mainers are struggling with mental health issues, shouldn't we be transitioning our limited budget dollars from corrections towards investing in meeting those needs in our communities and providing services to help keep people out of our jails and prisons? I urge you to support the mission of restoring lives and vote ought to pass on LD 178.