

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, My name is Kyle Bennett and I am a resident of Bangor. I have been impacted by the justice system here in Maine.

I am speaking today to show my absolute support for LD 178 and the effort to re-establish parole in Maine. I support this bill because long term incarceration isn't healthy. Being forced away from friends, family and community supports for months to years is very detrimental to people's mental health and well-being. Being put behind bars doesn't hold anyone accountable for the harm done nor does it give people a chance to correct the harm done or address the impact that affected others.

Being given parole in Maine would allow so many people to be allowed to reintegrate back in the community with supervision rather than spend years behind bars. It would give people a chance to access services and community, it would give a second chance to live and have dreams and complete goals.

Maine's prison system is racist and targets people of color. Black people make up 11% of the prison population with 12% having life sentences. In Maine you are more likely to be pulled over and targeted based on skin color. Maine gives more opportunities to white people for probation.

I am speaking today because I was incarcerated for 120 days. I was alone with limited contact, everyday I thought about killing myself but I couldn't stand the thought of my family getting that phone call or honestly reading about it in the newspaper because the prison system really doesn't care and probably won't call your family. When you're locked up you have no outside contact except for limited very expensive phone calls and if you are poor, your family can't afford the expense, so contact is very limited.

The majority of incarcerated people either struggle with substances or have a mental health diagnosis which would be better treated in the community. Long-term lock up in prison is a death sentence alone. Being granted parole would give people a chance to think about their future and how they can be successful in society.

I urge you to support LD 178 and reestablish parole.