

Sen. Anne Beebe-Center, Senate Chair

Rep. Suzanne Salisbury, House Chair, Distinguished Committee Members

Thank you for allowing me to share my testimony today.

My name is Joanna Stokinger, and I am a former domestic violence victim advocate with the Maine Department of Corrections and most recently a victim advocate with the Maine Attorney General's office in the homicide unit for the last nearly 5 years until June of last year. I am also a co-leader for the Maine Chapter of Parents of Murdered Children and a board member of that organization. I am also a surviving family member of a homicide victim and my family is in the midst of the trial process of the murder of my 6 week old grandson.

I do not represent any of the organizations that I have worked for in the past. I am simply providing testimony as someone that has spent years advocating for victims of crime. I hold a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice and a Master's Degree in Criminology. I have had a career in criminal justice for 20 years. While living and working in Alaska I worked for Alaska's Public Defender Agency for 8 years. I worked with and advocated for criminal defendants, many charged with sex offenses and murder. I am not blind or unsympathetic to the rights of inmates. Human and civil rights should be afforded to all- including those who are incarcerated. I do not believe parole to be a human right. **I am fully opposed to Maine Reinstating Parole.**

Those deeply affected by parole are the families, friends, and survivors of victims of crime. Victims of crime need certainty that when their case is tried and a sentence is given that they won't have to worry every few years that their offender could get out of prison on parole. The Maine corrections system already has several measures in place such as supervised community control, early release, and good time that inmates are afforded that reduces their sentences and allows for supervision and release. Speaking as someone who has had many conversations with families of homicide victims both personally and professionally, Victims and survivors of crime can't forget the horrific things that were done to them or their loved ones. The act of a parole system and the hearings traumatizes victims and survivors of crime over and over again.

It's not fair to victims to add this other level of trauma and uncertainty to their plate. Maine has not had a parole system for nearly 50 years. After working with victims in Alaska, Florida, and Maine I can honestly say being able to tell victims of crime that there's no parole in Maine gives them a huge feeling of peace and certainty. Please consider victims and survivors in your decision.

Joanna Stokinger

Winslow, Maine