

My name is Kage Johnson. I am here today in full support of LD 648. I am a co-founder and member of Healing First!, a transformative justice collective led by survivors of serious harm. I am the Maine state chapter representative of the growing global coalition, Survivors For Justice Reform, and I also serve on the steering committee of MERJ (Maine Restorative Justice Coalition), as I am a restorative & transformative justice practitioner. I am also here today to offer my perspective as a survivor of serious harm, including assault and rape. Healing First!, the transformative justice collective that I have helped to found, has come to be because we see an immense need to claim a public collective voice as survivors who want healing-based alternatives to incarceration in the wake of harm. For a long time now, we have witnessed the many ways in which our current system, including the use of incarceration, especially long-term, responds to harm with more harm, without providing accountability, healing, or justice. The criminal legal system has largely failed us. The use of dehumanization, isolation, and punishment enacted through incarceration and longer sentences has not and will not lead us to a world free from violence and crime.

For those who may feel concerned about "safety" regarding this bill, there are certainly enough safety measures in place, given that anyone eligible would have to be evaluated against the standard criteria for the SCC program. If it were up to me and other survivors of Healing First!, we would want to see this opportunity even more widely extended. Currently, Maine has the harshest sentencing in the entire country. Maine does not offer parole, a key incentive for incarcerated people to engage in self-improvement and become better members of their communities. Other states without parole have other mechanisms to earn reduced sentences—as should we. I hope to see parole brought back to Maine as well.

We must also acknowledge that incarceration is a massive waste of our financial resources and tax dollars, as the average cost of incarcerating a person in Maine is about \$117,000 per year. *That's for just one person.* I would much rather see our financial resources going to programs that would genuinely foster and increase opportunities to experience justice, accountability, and healing, such as through restorative justice programs and greater rehabilitation, reentry, and community supports like job training, mental health, and substance use treatment, and the expansion of this SCC program.

Rather than providing treatment or rehabilitation to disrupt the ongoing trauma that justice-involved people often face, existing research shows us that our system functions in a way that perpetuates a cycle of violence and does nothing to address the root causes of violence. Incarceration causes further harm not only to those who are incarcerated, but to their loved ones and communities; incarceration tears families apart, forcing loved ones to go through life without their incarcerated loved one present. This trauma contributes to cycles of harm. We need to invest in and expand rehabilitative, restorative options. Expanding this program would also work to reduce recidivism by easing the transition back into the community after years of incarceration.

Most importantly, there is significant data that has emerged which tells us that the vast majority of survivors of harm do not believe that longer incarceration sentences are the answer. This is

certainly true from the perspective of those of us who are survivors of harm, even the most serious forms of harm, like myself and other members of Healing First! and Survivors For Justice Reform, who are survivors of sexual violence, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, human trafficking, gun violence, etc. According to the latest report, released in 2024, from the Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) and Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice:

- a) 1 in 3 people in the US have been a victim of violent crime in the last decade. Only 16% of victims of violent crime believe that longer prison sentences are the most effective crime prevention strategy.
- b) Data has demonstrated that nearly 3 out of 5 victims of violence prefer policies that prevent crime by strengthening communities over policies that respond to crime by punishing people who commit crimes.
- c) Most significantly— By a margin of 3 to 1, survivors prefer rehabilitation, mental health treatment, drug treatment, community supervision, or community service.

The report is titled: Crime Survivors Speak: A National Survey of Victims' View on Safety and Justice. I highly recommend that the data from this report be taken into consideration.

I invite us to reflect upon the question: Whose perspective on this matter carries the most weight? As those most impacted by violence and crimes carried out, our voices and our opinions on this, as survivors of harm, should be heard and heeded. What is the function of our criminal legal system, if not to attempt to provide justice for those who have been harmed?

The Crime Survivors Speak report states, "Listening to the experiences and preferences of violent crime victims can -- and should -- guide policymakers toward new solutions that can address the dual crisis of a lack of safety and mass incarceration. Listening to victims, and aligning our safety systems with their needs and policy preferences would transform our nation: from security for some to real safety for all."

The data is undeniable. The numbers are clear. Our voices are ample. The vast majority of us, we, survivors of harm, even the most serious, egregious forms are harm, are in support of bill LD 648 and any other bills that emerge and support pathways for shorter incarceration sentencing or bills that seek to provide increased accessibility to options for alternative justice pathways, such as restorative justice, which survivors have long been seeking and will continue fighting for.

I restate my position that I am in full support of LD 648. It is time for Maine to catch up with other states who are investing in genuine pathways for justice, accountability, healing, and rehabilitation versus wasting our resources on harsher sentencing, which only causes further harm and truly offers no benefit to anyone. Thank you for your time and consideration.

With care,  
Kage Johnson

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<https://asj.allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/crime-survivors-speak-2024/>.