

Earl Bieler
807 Cushing Rd
Warren, ME, 04684

LD648 Ought To Pass
An Act To Expand the Supervised Community Confinement Program

I dropped out of highschool when I was fourteen years old and already had a problem with substances at that time. In 2010, I was sentenced to fifty-five years at the Maine State Prison when I was twenty four years old and at that time I deserved that sentence. Once incarcerated, I continued to use drugs and spent the first 6-7 years in and out seg, for fighting. Although I had periods of time I would try to stay clean, I didn't know how to live sober. I never had the experience of a positive role model and I didn't know there was any other way to live. I grew up in an environment where heavy drug use and violence was the norm. It was all I knew.

Once the pandemic began in 2020, I was isolated due to illness caused by my drug use. At this point I was in my mid thirties and realized I wasn't a kid anymore and I needed to learn to cope and manage my life differently. I applied to college and began participating in rehabilitative programming offered at the prison. I didn't know at the time how much this decision would change me, I just knew I needed to be a better version of myself.

I'm the first person in my family to attend college as I work towards a degree in psychology. Pursuing this course of study has given me a better understanding of myself. I learned about Adverse Childhood Experiences(ACEs) and how the effects of traumatic experiences in early childhood affect us well into adulthood. This research helped me process and understand what I had been through and why I reacted the way I did to situations. It was such an emotional struggle I almost quit school and considered using drugs again, but I had grown up and understood the maladaptive behaviors I had once relied on were not going to serve me if I wanted to improve and better my future. I'm proud to say I was able to get through remembering and processing the childhood abuse I suffered without picking up substances again.

I've been incarcerated for sixteen years now and have learned new and better coping strategies. I will be turning 41 this summer and continue to work on my recovery. I'm grateful I am no longer the person I was at 24 years old. I often think about how much I've already lost and

the decades ahead of me. I spent a lot of time wishing I had made better choices when I was a teenager and young adult. At that time, the drug use and trauma I experienced got in the way of me being able to fully realize there were other options for me. Since my time incarcerated, through education, programming and the work of volunteers who have come inside to share their experiences and hope, I've been able to grow in a positive direction and envision a way of life for myself centered around recovery and community. I've been able to change my way of thinking and behavior.

Older adults look back at their teenage years and early adulthood and shake their heads at the foolish decisions they made and regret their choices. Us who are incarcerated have that same human experience. We are capable of learning new skills and adopting healthy coping strategies. We are capable of growing up.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 648.