

Scott Martin
LD 1941: in favor

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Scott Martin and I live in Bar Harbor. I am writing in support of LD1941, an Act to implement recommendations of the Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole.

I stand before you today on my last day of Supervised Community Confinement Program, so you can only imagine how powerful this experience is for me today.

I entered the prison system full of fear and in active addiction, having had 10 years of sobriety before relapsing which led me to making choices that had consequences like a 5-year prison sentence. I made a choice to have my experience be one of not going to prison but be like going to an Ashram. The first would be surviving the experience and do no work to change my life, basically watch TV and play cards. The other would be me taking advantage of the time and do the work so that I would become a better man and to be of service to my fellows.

It was the final days of COVID with no outside volunteers bringing in support group meetings or 12 step programs. Having had ten years of sobriety, I knew that I just needed another person and a big book of A.A. and I could have a meeting. So, my cellmate and I started reading the Big Book and were noticed by others and very quickly, 2 became 7 of us. A small portion of the men in the pod, but recovery is not so much for people who need it but for those who want it.

One night, a resident struggling with mental issues shared he was suicidal. It was a hard call on what to do next. I could tell a guard and watch the young man be put in a turtle suit (straight jacket), but instead, our group of seven huddled around him and one by one we shared how at one point we felt like him. I can't find the words to describe watching his light, his soul brighten as each man shared his experience. Then came the night I was told I was to go to court the next day and be made an example of what happens in front of Drug Court. I had never been to prison and was full of fear, not wanting others to see my vulnerability. I hid in the bathroom and began to weep. Word quickly spread of my state of mind throughout the pod and my group of seven found me hiding and circled around me to express support. Each one shared how much working with them in our recovery group had changed their lives. My tears stopped as I realized I had made a difference in the last four months and that as I faced years of imprisonment, not only was there an opportunity to work on myself but to be of service and host recover meetings where there was still none, due to COVID. I tell you all this to give you an idea of my mindset as I arrived in prison.

It became very clear quite quickly that there were two basic types of residents. One had a history of being institutionalized, of being in a revolving door in and out of prison with no plan to make changes this time. Then there were others who wanted to better themselves and that could be done in a number of ways, from going to the gym, to church, to the classroom, to self help 12 step programs. Before coming in, I had the belief that if you did the crime, you do the time and after seeing their crime be played out in a news cycle, I would not ever give much thought to them again. Now these men were my cell mates, my coworkers, fellows I was getting vulnerable with in support groups. So yes, it was unnerving to discover that this man I had been getting friendly with or work alongside with or closing my eyes and sleeping next to had murdered people. It was a huge opportunity for me to see how fast I

judge people and hold them to the worst mistake in their lives. It had me reading the Saint Francis Prayer carefully and repeatedly.

I could give you example after example of men who were doing huge amounts of time, who suffered from great grief and regret, who wept in front of a room in healing circles. There was a young man who drank at a party and made the decision to wait until the morning to drive his family home. He fell asleep at the wheel and ended up putting his family in the Emergency Room and killing one of his boys. He tried to do the right thing and wait until the next day. It was a tragic accident. He suffers with guilt and weeps. What good does it serve to keep this young man from his family? Another took a pill offered by a coworker and, in a black out, killed his wife he so loved. He has spent 20 years already in prison and can't tell the story without weeping with regret. Again, I can go on and on but must save room to tell you of one man, John Okie.

As I was trying to find my place and routine in prison, I noticed a young man who seemed to be everywhere. Every corner I turned in the Education Department, every self-help group, there he was and most of the time being of service. I became friends with John, and he guided me to a position of Prison Recovery Facilitator of which there was 3 of us and he was our go to for any issues or guidance needed. To walk from one area of the prison to another with John was a constant stop and go. You could not get 20 feet without someone stopping him and asking for help. He was always gracious and humble and available. John became a role model for me. Not only did I want to do my time like he was doing his, I wanted to become the man he had become.

I ended up getting accused of a crime while in prison, which lead me to be in solitary confinement. I was innocent but who would believe me? I was at a place of incomprehensible demoralization with no hope. It was actually this moment that I totally surrendered and let go to God's will and it has been a huge turning point for me. John came weekly and for an hour he would breathe back hope into my life, coaching me to stay positive and grateful. The case was overturned, and I was found innocent but the work I did with John and the surrendering to God's will has sustained me and guided my decisions moving forward since.

John, like the others, experienced how actions cost lives. At 17 years old he took PCP putting him in a psychotic state to which he ended up killing his father and his girlfriend. John is now approaching 40. He has spent his entire adult life behind bars. His family has forgiven him and his mother, who has suffered strokes, still travels hours to visit him. John gave me the tools to be a better man and to be of service to others. It was so hard to leave John behind and not to be able to give hope. I did promise I would do anything I could, so for the last 6 months I've been on home confinement and have held a job. I've attended 12 step meetings every day and actually run 3 of them currently. So, on my first day of freedom, I stand before you, fulfilling my promise to John.

I know this sounds extreme, and it is, but I would consider very seriously that if given the chance for me to serve John's sentence and allow him his freedom, he would be a huge service to any community he joined and be a lifeline for his mother while saving the taxpayers of Maine thousands of dollars.

If you Google parole, Maine comes up first on the list of states that do not allow it. While at the prison, I would see visitors from other state prisons come to witness our system that has been setting the standards for incarcerated people in our nation. Let Maine do the same with parole. Let's be leaders in showing there is a better way. I urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1941. Thank you.