

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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Testimony in support of LD 1941 to the Committee on the Judiciary

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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston.

For me, my work in the legislature and in reentry is a ministry. When I say to you that I am formerly incarcerated and a person in long-term recovery,* I am offering myself as an example of redemptive potential. An example that people who do terrible things are not necessarily terrible people. That I am not the worst thing I have ever done. An illustration of how people can grow and change.

The issue of parole comes down to whether you believe in justice as vengeance or redemptive opportunity, whether you believe in punishment as a goal of justice or believe, as I do, in **punishment as a mechanism and opportunity for change and growth.**

Parole is not for everyone. Parole is for those who take advantage of the opportunities to grow and learn and become better people. Parole is for those who have **done the WORK** of recovery and redemption.

I have advocated for there to be peer support workers in the Department of Corrections. These would be experienced residents who meet with new residents when they are still in reception and ask or challenge the newbie with "How are you going to take advantage of this time?"

When I was in prison I met some men who scared the hell out of me and I never want to see again. I also met some of the best men I have ever known—men whose light and example and faith lit up the place and inspired others. Those are the men who have taken advantage of this opportunity to grow and change.

* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.

Parole is not a way of rewarding them, **parole is a way of rewarding US** by having such amazing people in our communities, to contribute their skills and industry and faith and courage and taxes.

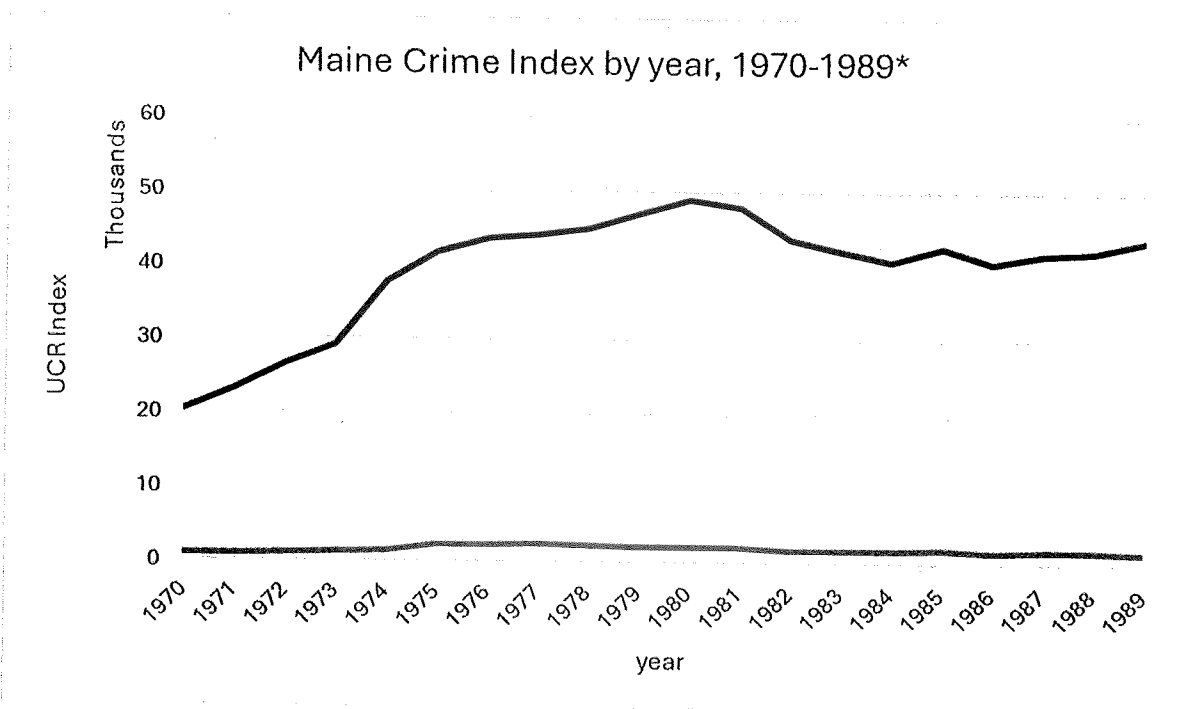
Parole is the right thing to do, it is the effective thing to do.

Keeping people in prison longer costs money without being effective. Longer prison terms **do not keep crime down** and they don't lower recidivism.

Parole is NOT being soft on crime. Parole does NOT increase crime.

Abolishing parole in Maine did NOT bring down crime rates. Look at this graph:

The top trend line is the overall Index Crime Rate from the FBI Uniform Crime Reports. The bottom trend line is the Violent Crime Rate. The abolition of Parole was in 1976.



Thank you for your generous attention.

I'd be happy to try to answer questions.