

Testimony in Support of LD 1941:
An Act to Implement Recommendations of the Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole
Sponsored by Nina Milliken

Dear Members of the Maine Legislature,

My name is Brandi Richmond. I believe parole should be re-established in Maine because people are capable of profound change, and our justice system should recognize that growth. I am currently incarcerated at the Southern Maine Women's Re-entry Center (SMWRC), serving a 3.5-year sentence. In my time here, I have seen women serving long sentences who have taken full responsibility for their actions and worked tirelessly to rehabilitate themselves. Currently, over 28% of all incarcerated women in Maine are serving sentences of five years or longer, yet they have no mechanism to prove they are ready to return to their communities.¹ Without the possibility of parole, their transformation remains unacknowledged, which often leads to a crushing sense of defeat.

Parole is not a guarantee of release. It is a structured and thoughtful review process that considers behavior, rehabilitation efforts, and public safety. Allowing parole would give people an incentive to participate in programs, pursue education, address trauma, and maintain good conduct. When individuals know their efforts matter, they are more motivated to change and to prepare for a successful return to society. Studies show that a lack of parole options can actually decrease prison safety, as the incentive for good behavior is removed.²

Many women serving long sentences have histories of trauma, addiction, and mental health challenges. Over time, through counseling, accountability, and self-reflection, many become very different people than they were at the time of their offense. A system without parole treats people as if they can never change, rather than evaluating who they are today. Research on "aging out" of crime shows that as people mature, the likelihood of re-offending drops significantly; for instance, recidivism rates for those released after age 50 are exceptionally low compared to younger demographics.³ Everyone deserves a second chance, especially if they

¹ Matheny, M. (2024, March 24). *Parole, Extreme Sentences, and Data Transparency*. Freedom & Captivity. <https://www.freedom-captivity.org/fc-library/parole-extreme-sentences-and-data-transparency>

² Seckan, B., May 13, T. J. R., & 2013. (2013, May 13). *How should inmates be released from prison? Parole versus fixed-sentence regimes*. The Journalist's Resource. <https://journalistsresource.org/criminal-justice/how-should-inmates-released-prison-assessment-parole-versus-fixed-sentence/>

³ Nellis, A., & Barry, C. (2025, January 8). *A Matter of Life: The Scope and Impact of Life and Long Term Imprisonment in the United States – The Sentencing Project*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/a-matter-of-life-the-scope-and-impact-of-life-and-long-term-imprisonment-in-the-united-states/>

have proven that it is deserved.

Allowing parole would also benefit the state by reducing the costs associated with incarcerating people who no longer pose a risk to public safety, particularly aging individuals. Keeping people incarcerated with no opportunity for review does not improve public safety and places unnecessary strain on resources. It currently costs Maine taxpayers an average of \$111 per day—roughly over \$40,000 to \$75,000 per year depending on the facility and medical needs—to incarcerate one person, whereas parole supervision costs only a small fraction of that amount.⁴

Most importantly, parole provides hope. It gives people something to work toward and reinforces the idea that rehabilitation matters. I believe Maine can uphold accountability while still offering second chances. Allowing parole would create a fairer, humane, and effective justice system—one that values responsibility, growth, and the possibility of redemption.

Thank you,

Brandi Richmond

⁴ MECEP. (2022, March 21). *A Better Path for Maine: The Case for Decriminalizing Drugs - MECEP*. MECEP. <https://www.mecap.org/taxes-and-budget/a-better-path-for-maine-the-case-for-decriminalizing-drugs/>