



Restorative Justice Project Maine

Testimony in Support of LD 1941 to the Committee on Judiciary
An Act to Implement Recommendations of The Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole

January 8, 2026

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

My name is Charlotte Cramer, I live in Bowdoinham, and I speak to you today on behalf of Restorative Justice Project Maine's Legislative Committee in support of LD 1941, An Act to Implement Recommendations of the Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole.

When considering parole, I believe we must start by asking ourselves a fundamental question: What do we want our criminal legal system to be for? Do we believe it should truly be about correction—about helping people understand the impact of their actions, so that they learn, change, and don't repeat the same harm? Do we believe in offering people opportunities to make up for their mistakes? Or do we believe in permanent punishment—labeling people as irredeemable and locking them away, even though those who end up incarcerated have disproportionately experienced poverty, racism, and trauma?

Parole represents a choice: between retribution and rehabilitation, retaliation and repair, punishment and prevention. The Maine Department of Corrections states that its goal is to "rebuild and transform lives." But that goal rings hollow when we don't have a meaningful mechanism for release for those who have successfully rebuilt and transformed their lives. This bill creates that mechanism. It does not guarantee release, but instead gives people who have demonstrated meaningful change the opportunity to have their efforts reviewed by the Parole Board. It doesn't undermine public safety, but establishes a careful evaluation process, requiring the Parole Board to develop administrative release guidelines and utilize an evidence-based risk assessment in its decision making.

In my work facilitating restorative justice processes for youth facing criminal charges, I see firsthand that when people are given the opportunity to show accountability and make amends for their actions, they do. LD 1941 would allow those who have caused serious harm to demonstrate how they have changed and to return to their communities with insight and purpose. The youth I work with desperately need mentors and role models who both understand their struggles, and who show—through lived experience—that it is possible to overcome those struggles. Returning citizens have a unique ability to connect with our at-risk youth, break cycles of trauma and harm, and strengthen our communities. Importantly, reestablishing parole would give incarcerated people even more of a reason to engage in rehabilitation and personal growth, knowing that their efforts may one day be meaningfully recognized.

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This bill is an opportunity for Maine to invest in hope, redemption, and the potential for people to be known not for their worst mistakes, but for who they have become since. If, like me, and like my colleagues at Restorative Justice Project Maine, you believe in people's capacity to change for the better, then I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1941.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Cramer, Director of Youth Services
Restorative Justice Project Maine Legislative Committee

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