

Good morning, Chairperson Carney and other distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on a bill that I am very passionate about seeing passed: LD 1941, an Act to Implement Recommendation of the Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole in Maine.

My name is Kelly Taylor, and I live in South Thomaston. I am a Social Studies teacher at Oceanside High School in Rockland, and I have for nearly 40 years taught all social studies subject areas in grades 7-12. So today, I want to speak to you from the point of view of a Government, History, and Law teacher whose students write Legislative Documents, hold committee hearings, and debate the pros and cons of their bills. And I ask: what makes a good bill?

In the words of former President Obama: “A good compromise, a good piece of legislation, is like a good sentence. Or a good piece of music. Everybody can recognize it. They say, ‘Huh. It works. It makes sense.’”

Reestablishing Parole in Maine DOES make sense! In a government system where both the Preambles to the U.S. and Maine Constitution list as a primary goal of government to “establish Justice,” not having an active Parole board does not make sense nor does it “establish Justice.” The Justice system’s use of a Parole Board is a check and balance against injustice and against one branch of government, such as an Executive branch having too much absolute power over such matters as reprieves, commutations and pardons, or a Judicial system which hands out sentences of extreme and unwieldly lengths. A Parole Board would allow more voices to be heard, especially those voices who are the incarcerated members of our society and who want to become productive members of society after having served lengthy amounts of time in the carceral system.

In today’s world of Restorative Justice practices, incarcerated men and women are looking for ways that they can be restored, rehabilitated, and are eager to exercise what they have learned. Over the last nine years, I have been a frequent visitor to events at the Maine State Prison. I have observed how many men are actively involved in making the world they live in a better place through access to higher education, through Hospice volunteering, through mentoring and tutoring others, and through sharing with others their hopes and dreams for the future.

Reestablishing parole in Maine is the right thing to do. Our prisons are overcrowded, services are limited, and lengthy incarcerations are very costly. Parole originally was established in the Justice system as judges knew that some

people are rehabilitated sooner than others. Maine was the first state to establish a parole system in 1913 allowing for release after serving up to half the sentence, and after 30 years for a life sentence. Then, as you know, in 1976, Maine got “tough on crime” and eliminated parole for Mainers. Through structured supervision, parole is a positive public safety issue unlike unsupervised release after a full sentence is served. Then there are the economic benefits of the exploding costs of incarceration. Finally reunifying families is the humane thing to do.

As Gov. Mills said in her 2nd Inauguration Address, “Hope is not an easy thing. It’s not mere wishful thinking. It’s not just trying to do what we did yesterday in the same old, same old ways...It challenges and changes the way we do things. It calls on us to advance and adapt, while preserving who we are as a people and all the values we hold dear.”

Therefore, I respectfully submit and share my hope for change. Please reinstate parole in Maine, because as human beings, we all deserve hope for the future.