

Testimony in support of L.D. 1941: "An Act to Implement
Recommendations of the Commission to Examine
Reestablishing Parole"

Presented by Jeffrey Evangelos, of Friendship, Maine. Presented to the Judiciary Committee on Thursday, January 8, 2026.

Good morning, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and other distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. I'm sorry I'm unable to appear here in person today to present this testimony. It's been almost 5 long years since I introduced the parole bill, which was amended into this study commission.

In 1976, Maine became the first state in the Union to abolish parole. At that time, Maine had about 10 women in prison and about 500 men incarcerated. The abolition of parole and the adoption of the new criminal code in 1976 led to a sharp increase in incarceration. Today, we have approximately 200 women incarcerated and roughly 1600 men. Those are shocking numbers. See attached DOC study.

While I could go on with statistical information, I'd like to speak to you today about Hope. Nearly half of all US adults have a family member who has experienced incarceration. It could be you or me. Imagine a world that doesn't believe in second chances. A world without a second chance for a mistake you made when you were between 18-25 years old. Despite holding yourself accountable and seeking redemption, there's no pathway to redeem yourself. No matter what you do to hold yourself accountable and redeem yourself, the efforts are useless, killing hope. It's a very dark place.

Thirty-four states still have parole systems in place, including all of New England and New York. Without parole, states rely

mostly on the discretionary powers of Governors, that of pardons and Executive Clemency.

Truthfully in Maine, while pardons are sometimes issued, often for politically connected individuals, pardons are never issued to incarcerated individuals who have worked tirelessly to improve their lives and have held themselves accountable for their mistakes. Shamefully, Maine pardoned Don Gellers, an attorney who was assisting the Passamaquoddy Nation in the 1960s & 1970s. Gellers was framed by police and the Attorney General's Office. Gellers died in 2014. He wasn't pardoned until 2019...a post humus pardon? We can't do better than that?

In reference to the other Executive Power available since the abolition of parole, that of Executive Clemency, Maine's Governors have never granted even one application. Since 1976, no one in Maine has ever been granted Executive Clemency, underscoring the failure of Maine's determinate sentencing system.

LD-1941 re-establishes parole. It is a critical step in recognizing the good reform work being undertaken at our prisons sponsored by our own Department of Corrections. Many of our incarcerated residents are in prison for 30 years all the way to life for mistakes they made when they were 18-21 years old. We all know the brain of a teenager isn't fully developed. In one case in 2005-2006, a 14-year-old boy was tried as an adult and sentenced to 25 years in prison. In 2013 he had this to say:

"The person I was at 15 is almost unrecognizable from the person I am today...I've grown in ways emotionally, in ways I couldn't begin to describe. My relationships with people are so much better. I'm so much more of a calm person," said Patrick.

"I wish that all of it could be taken back. Knowing at the time what irreparable harm you've done to a person, to a family, to a community...There's no way to express that or put it into words. There's no action I could possibly do that could apologize for the damage that I've done."

In 2019, the Prison Policy Initiative graded the prison release system in all 50 states. Maine earned an F-, the lowest grade due to the harshest determinate sentencing system in the nation, combined with no parole system.

In a Feb 13, 2020, New York Times article entitled "It Didn't Work", the Times reported that states which abolished parole are now re-examining that decision:

"We thought we were fighting crime, and it didn't work," said David Marsden, a state senator in Virginia, who has previously introduced bills to restore parole ... But more recently, we've stopped trying to teach lessons and started trying to solve problems. People are now more likely to believe that people deserve a second chance"

Senator Carney, Rep.Kuhn, I believe in the dignity of people, I believe, when earned, in second chances. I believe in accountability and most importantly, I believe in redemption, the capacity of human beings to right the wrongs of the past. Yes, I feel deeply for the victims as well. But society is not made safer when Maine's Correction's systems frustrate hope and redemption. All this does is increase recidivism when a resident is released and 95% of incarcerated people will be released someday.

Maine's state prisons are doing a great job in promoting college education and other training inside the walls. But this great work does not get recognized like it does in other states. In New York, the

Parole Board carefully examines the progress made by residents each year when it examines applications. In Maine, you can earn a master's degree with a 4.0 average, work hard, and never get in trouble and you get out of prison the same time as someone who refuses to work and gives the guards a hard time. I call Maine's prison and release system **Killing Hope**.

Thank you for your consideration.

<https://www.maine.gov/corrections/sites/maine.gov.corrections/files/inline-files/PopReport3-11-24.pdf>

<https://www.pressherald.com/2019/10/17/family-and-tribal-members-plead-for-posthumous-pardon-for-don-gellers/>

<https://www.themainemonitor.org/lawmaker-pushes-to-restore-parole-to-maines-justice-system/>

<https://archive.bdnblogs.com/1990/03/27/probation-officer-advocates-parole/>

https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/grading_parole.html

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/13/us/parole-virginia.html>