

## Testimony in Support of LD1941: A Bill to Reestablish Parole

My name is Earl "Buddy" Bieler. I am incarcerated at the Maine State Prison, and I am here to support LD 1941.

I was already using drugs and heading nowhere good when I dropped out of high school at age 14. In 2010, I was sentenced to 55 years in prison at the age of 24. I have hurt people. I made serious choices that I take responsibility for.

When I first came to prison, I didn't believe change was possible, or didn't I know it was possible. I kept using drugs. I spent my first six or seven years going in and out of segregation for fighting. I didn't know how to live sober. I didn't know how to live any other way. I grew up around violence and addiction. That was normal to me. I never had positive role models, and I didn't have the tools to do better.

Things didn't start to change until 2020, during the pandemic. I got sick because of my drug use and ended up isolated. By then, I was in my mid-thirties. I realized I wasn't a kid anymore, and if my life was ever going to be different, it was on me. No one was coming to save me and I couldn't keep living the way I had been.

Today, I am the first person in my family to attend college. I am working toward a degree in psychology. I learned about Adverse Childhood Experiences and how trauma follows people into adulthood. For the first time in my life, I faced my past sober. It was painful. It cracked me open. There were moments I wanted to quit. Instead, I used the skills I was learning and stayed in recovery.

I have now been incarcerated for 16 years and sober for 5. I will turn 42 this summer and I am not the same person I was at 24. Education, programming, and people who believed in rehabilitation changed how I think, how I act, and how I am planning for the future.

Parole is not about avoiding accountability. It is about recognizing growth when it actually happens. LD 1941 creates a path for people who have done the work to be seen as who they are in the present, not just who they were at their worst moment.

Parole matters for people like me. Not because we were forced to change, and not because someone made us. It matters because we chose to. Because we wanted to take responsibility, live differently, and become better human beings.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote "Ought To Pass" on LD 1941.

Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Earl "Buddy" Bieler

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