

Testimony in Support of LD1941: A Bill to Reestablish Parole

To Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Nicole Lund. I am a graduate student at the University of Maine in Farmington studying Counseling Psychology and a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor. My interest in pursuing a career as a psychological clinician specializing in addiction treatment stems from my lived experience as a survivor of violent crime and a person in long-term recovery. I am incredibly grateful for the second chance I was given through diversionary programs, rehabilitation and substance use treatment services I received in lieu of prison while I was actively using in Massachusetts. Nobody at the time of my active use could have predicted when I would rehabilitate. I am also grateful to have overcome my adversity and that I am able to be here today to talk about second chances.

It is impossible for me to not believe in a person's ability to rehabilitate and change because I have changed immensely since my time engaging in criminal behavior, as have many other people who were once in my position. People are capable of change when they are provided the resources and support to do so. A judge at the time of sentencing has no way of knowing how long it will take a person to rehabilitate. Without parole as an option, we are asking a judge to do the impossible. A judge must blindly guess at what point in the future a perpetrator will no longer be a danger to society. We are asking a judge to predict the future and decide how long a person must be warehoused before they will age out of their criminal behavior.

The concept of aging out of crime is not anecdotal. One of the most robust relationships in criminology is between age and crime. Criminality increases in adolescence, peaks in the late teens and early 20s, and then continually decreases as a person ages. This relationship is the

foundation for the well-known “age-crime curve,” which underlies predictions and risk assessments about future offending. (Lofstrom et al., 2023) Inhibitory control, a primary executive function, affects a person’s ability to stop themselves from an automatic response and think through the consequences of an action. Research has shown young adults lack the same level of inhibitory control as older adults and are more likely to engage in dangerous or problematic behavior such as abusing substances, violence and recklessness.

It is well understood in the mental health community, adverse childhood experiences(ACEs) greatly increase a persons likelihood to become incarcerated due to maladaptive behaviors such as problematic substance use. These ACEs, when not addressed, can manifest as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD) which results in automatic responses. PTSD is a treatable mental health condition linked to substance use and antisocial or criminal behavior. Traumatic experiences can manifest themselves as nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive memories, antisocial behaviors, persistent negative beliefs and emotional state, and reckless or self-destructive behavior(DSM-5, 2022). The sufferer finds themself reliving the traumatic events as though it is happening to them again and again. If a person has suffered trauma as a child, they are much more likely to engage in dangerous or antisocial behavior and become incarcerated. PTSD occurs at significantly higher rates in incarcerated individuals compared to the general population. Incarcerated individuals have also been found to have experienced a significantly higher rate of ACEs(Hodges-Pietryka, 2022). It is estimated 65% of the United States prison population meets the criteria for Substance use disorder(SUD). An additional 20%, while not meeting the full criteria for SUD, were under the influence at the time their crime was committed(NIDA, 2020).

It is a shameful thing for our society to incarcerate people suffering from mental health conditions without ever offering the opportunity for them to heal and reintegrate. I have witnessed first-hand people can change when they are given the resources to do so. Parole offers a person the motivation, encouragement and support they need to heal, grow, and change. As a Maine resident, I would welcome a paroled individual into my community and happily support them in their recovery.

Thank you for your time and I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD1941.

Sincerely,

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References:

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