

Good morning Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and respected members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary.

My name is Benjamin Miller, and I am an associate of Society Impact of Portland, Maine. We are a statutory public benefit company that helps state and local governments and community organizations create more just, safe and fiscally responsible legal systems, public safety policies and programs. We are presently working with a community group and Maine Judicial Branch officials to create a pilot case diversion program in Penobscot County, Maine.

I am here today to urge the swift passage of L.D. 1941. For nearly 50 years, Maine has operated a one way justice system. We have become the only state in New England to abolish parole. In doing so, we have traded a proven tool for rehabilitation for a system of permanent and high cost incarceration that serves neither the taxpayer nor public safety.

Currently, Maine spends between \$75,000 and \$115,000 per year to keep a single person behind bars. By contrast, supervising an individual in the community through a parole program costs a fraction of that amount. According to the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, the average annual cost of supervising a released individual is just \$4,742. That means that if Maine offered incarcerated individuals who have demonstrated genuine rehabilitation the opportunity for parole, taxpayers could save approximately \$70,000 to \$110,000 per person each year. Our neighboring state of Vermont has a successful parole rate of about 50%; if a similar proportion of Maine's incarcerated population were granted supervised release, it could potentially save upwards of \$50-\$100 million per year, depending on the number of individuals released. Even if the percentage granted parole were significantly lower than 50%, the state would still realize substantial taxpayer savings.

But this is not just about the bottom line. It is about the integrity of our justice system. The national average is that 95% of incarcerated people will eventually be released. Parole and parole preparation in prison are essential for successful reentry. Without parole, Maine lacks a meaningful incentive for incarcerated individuals to engage in the hard work of transformation. We are effectively telling the people slated to be eventually released from prison that no matter how much they change, the door is locked until a calendar date decides they are free. This creates a stagnant prison environment and does nothing to prepare individuals for the terrible burdens of collateral consequences after release.

When we lack a parole board to oversee a structured and supervised transition back into society, we actually increase the risk to community safety. Parole works because it provides accountability. It ensures that release can happen when it is demonstrably appropriate, not just after a certain amount of time has passed. It also provides the oversight necessary to help people secure housing and employment. These are the very things that keep our neighborhoods safe and reduce recidivism.

Maine is currently an outlier. We are lagging behind our neighbors in New Hampshire and Vermont who use parole to manage their prison populations in more humane and economically rational ways. I see no fiscal argument, no moral argument, and no safety arguments for not reinstating parole.

Passage of L.D. 1941 is a necessary step toward a system where justice is not a dead end but a path toward restoration. It is time to bring Maine back into alignment with the rest of the country. We must choose a system that values fiscal responsibility and human potential over permanent punishment.

Category	Annual cost/population/savings	Source / Context
Incarceration in Maine	\$75,000 – \$115,000	<u>Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee</u>
Parole Supervision	\$4,742	<u>Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts</u>
Maine incarcerated population	~1,500 - 2,000	<u>Maine Department of Corrections</u>
Potential Savings per person, per year	~\$70,000 – \$110,000	
TOTAL POTENTIAL SAVINGS	~\$50,000,000 - \$110,000,000	