

Good Day Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Thazra-Rosie Hylton of Portland. I am humbly speaking to you as a born-Mainer, a survivor of a violent attack, and a family member of an incarcerated individual here in our state. I strongly support LD 1941 to reestablish parole.

I love my home state, flaws and all..and I do consider the fact that we abolished [REDACTED] parole to be a coldhearted flaw. The cold weather we're currently experiencing will give way to warmth and new growth but there are people in our prisons that have made it through the coldest depths of terrible choices in life and are being denied any chance of bringing warmth to the communities they previously harmed. Even though they have served decades, learned, repented, changed, and repeatedly shown their capability of growth there is no hope for them to spring forth in life. Parole was abolished here 50 years ago as of this year and I believe that we have societally evolved past that choice, that we as a people believe in second chances. Maine's lack of parole sends a clear message that our system does not truly believe in redemption.

I've shared my survivor status just to illustrate that my position is not one-sided regarding second chances for people who have caused harm. I relate to the concerns and fears that can come along with having someone who caused me permanent physical and emotional scarring not being incarcerated. Every person, every survivor, has their own perspective on what justice and safety feel like. I feel that justice can only come to fruition when rehabilitation and forgiveness are at the forefront. I feel safer in a community that prioritizes healing over punishment.

Along with my general thoughts on the world I want to live in, I am speaking on behalf of four generations of my family members that are hurting and feeling hopeless. My baby brother was arrested for a horrible act right after he turned 18 and is entering his 18th year of incarceration..that's longer than the lifetime of several youths in our family that have no memories of him outside of a prison visiting room. My niece and nephew long for their uncle to be there to cheer them on for band performances and their upcoming graduations. My children are all adults who have grown up with this family separation; they and I are saddened by the fact that now my grandbabies are going to have the same disappointments as they grow. My mother is in her 70s and prays to see her youngest child walk through her door before she leaves this earth. His absence is felt at every family gathering and his support is needed as our mom ages. And there is a constant state of fear in the back of all our minds that something awful will happen and he won't ever get to come home. We are just one family, just one story but there are many other families in similar situations who would love a glimmer of hope.

With the current lack of parole, we continue to suffer with the pain that our family member caused to his victims and to our family. I hear folks talk about 'paying a debt to society' after a crime is committed, so why don't we let people truly do that after they have served a reasonable number of years? Right now, we tax paying citizens are paying to house an aging prison population who could be out here working in the community and contributing to society in a positive way.

Thank you for listening and considering my opinions. I look forward to your support of LD 1941.