

LD 1941: An Act To Implement Recommendations of Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole
In support

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee On Judiciary,

My name is John Okie, and I'm a resident at Mountain View Correctional Facility. I have been incarcerated for 18 years and have 33 years left on my sentence. During this time, I have seen a change in the system and a change in myself.

At 21 years old, I was sentenced to the Maine State Prison with two 30-year consecutive sentences. The first few years of prison life were what most would expect. There were fights, time in the hole, drug use. There was hate, anger, and debauchery, and there was also severe depression, guilt, and shame.

Then, in 2012, the MDOC began to introduce rehabilitative programs. I took one program, then another, and another. I started meeting regularly with a mental health counselor, who encouraged me to journal. I began to reflect on the interplay between thoughts and emotions, what causes them, and how they affect me and my approach to the world around me. I began experiencing space between emotions and actions, and I practiced responding rather than reacting. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was growing. I started taking care of my physical and mental health, went to recovery meetings, and became a recovery coach and peer facilitator.

Fear of losing what I gained pushed me to attend college while incarcerated. I wanted something different for myself. I hate the person I was. I've changed all of who I am, and I'm proud of the person I've become. I'm now a college student with a 3.98 GPA, but more importantly, I've grasped something I was missing all those years ago: purpose and meaning.

If I were afforded the opportunity of parole, I would continue on this path because I know the purpose and meaningfulness of the experiences I'm involved in. I would continue with my college education and recovery coaching, maybe start a small business, and continue to use the tools that have helped me cope over the past 18 years.

Because of the time I've spent incarcerated, I have a different outlook and appreciation for life. I strive to be a force that is greater than the 18 years I've spent locked behind prison walls. Parole would provide an opportunity for applied growth and atonement, an opportunity to make up for the pain and suffering I've caused. If given the chance of parole, I would do my best to make up for the choices I made. I would live as a changed man, in remembrance, respect, and honor of the hurt I once caused.

Thank you,

John Okie
Charleston, Maine