

5/12/2021

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To: Honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee  
Re: Letter in support for LD 1593

**Honorable members of the Legislature,**

I am writing this letter today in order to voice my support for LD 1593, a bill which aims to make long-needed improvements to the ways that the state of Maine reenters prisoners into society after confinement. As it currently stands, the supervised community confinement program is literally the only way that prisoners may enter back into society under a structured process of supervision in our state, one which should slowly reacclimate men and women to a world that has become foreign to them. The value of an adequate system of reentry cannot be understated; public safety depends on it, ending cycles of recidivism, violence, and harm depend on it, and without the changes that this bill is proposing we will continue to release people who are unprepared for freedom, back into society.

Without quality legislation aimed at adequately governing the rules around such a program as S.C.C.P. the process becomes overly vague, disjointed, and under-used as too much is left open to opinion and interpretation. Our state is in desperate need for legislation that lends both direction and clarity to uniform the process within each state facility where inmates become eligible for S.C.C.P.; additionally, it is past due time to transition this legislation towards one that aligns evidence-based approaches and best-practices into the criteria for S.C.C.P eligibility. Using evidence and data around a prisoner's rehabilitative efforts in order to make educated decisions about their reentry is a demand we should make of the department of corrections. I beg the honorable members of this committee to vote in favor of this bill in order to take a step in that direction.

The current S.C.C.P legislation is inadequate in achieving the goals I am speaking of. Because of the lack of specificity and direction, the program is being used to transfer overwhelmingly short-term prisoners into the community based on factors that are irrelevant in measuring the amount of change and rehabilitation they have engaged in. This is not in the best interest of our communities. In the twelve years that I have spent in prison I have done my best to make sense of this process; to help prepare others to utilize such a necessary step in their incarceration; to encourage men to always keep the possibility of reentry in mind as they move through their imprisonment. Unfortunately, the DOC's inability to utilize the process effectively has created a culture of hopelessness within the prison where too many abandon hope of achieving any process of reentry, and choose not to capitalize on the opportunities available in the prison due to a belief that it will not pay off—they will still be released with inadequate preparation and opportunities

for success regardless of how much they change. *Hopelessness is the most dangerous thing that someone in prison can experience*, and I can tell you with absolute confidence that this legislation has the ability to chip away at the negativity that is currently fueling recidivism in our state.

I implore you to pass LD 1593 in order to begin a process of repairing the inadequacies in our current system. Create a pathway to recovery, reentry, and rehabilitation for our state's prisoners, their families, and our communities at large. To vote against this bill would be to stand idly by while the opiate epidemic rages on, while recidivism hovers well above 60%, and while men and women are released from prison with little or no supervision, nothing to show for their efforts in changing and growing from their past mistakes, and a lack of hope for the future; those are dangerous people.

There is a common misconception about the obligation of justice, many people think that punishment is the way to secure justice for victims of crime, and this is a horrible belief for us to hold. The truth is that the most significant obligation of justice is to ensure that harms are not repeated, that those who break the social contract learn from the mistakes they have made and grow to accept the inevitable consequences for those mistakes as a process of *becoming* better, of *doing* better. Although punishment is a part of this process, it alone cannot invoke humans to change, but serves to only create new resentments and convince offenders that *they* are the true victims. To allow our state to maintain an inadequate system of reentry such as the current supervised community confinement program is to tell victims that we don't care about true justice, and that punishment will have to be enough to bring them peace and healing. Don't accept this misguided version of justice. Pass this bill so that you can fulfill your obligation as the keepers of justice and public safety; give prisoners a reason to change, and the chance to obtain the tools needed to reenter the world as people who are ready to contribute to the communities they once harmed. Vote "Ought to pass" on this LD 1539 so that the beginnings of rehabilitation and adequate reentry finally become realized in our State. Our communities depend on it, our families need it, and the victims that we claim to fight for deserve true justice, not just a symbol of it.

With much gratitude and respect,

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