

Good morning, and thank you.

My name is Mark Brown, and I am here to support the passing of LD 1593.

I'd like to tell you about three men:

Patrick Armstrong went to prison when he was 14 years old; as a young man he made an incredibly unfortunate mistake; convicted of manslaughter he was sentenced to 16 years in prison as an adult. Patrick has now been in prison for more time than he spent as a child in the free world, however, this extraordinary young man has grown in ways none could have imagined, or even hoped for. In 15 years of incarceration he has earned two college degrees, never had a single disciplinary infraction, become a talented writer, and has always maintained work. Despite his track record of growth, despite the fact that he has zero experience as an adult in the free world, and despite the fact that the pandemic has kept him from work release and seeing his family, he was denied supervised confinement for his last 8 months.

Anthony Normand has been in prison for more than thirty years. In that time, he has had one disciplinary infraction, it was the lowest category of infraction and it was over a decade ago. When Tony went to prison cell phones did not exist, touch screens had yet to be invented, the internet wasn't a thing. While incarcerated he has worked for the prison's industries program for decades. Before the pandemic you could have found him at the Prison showroom in Warren, dressed in regular clothes, dealing directly with the public as they shop the crafts made by Maine's prisoners. Tony is married and has a large support system. He has been unable to see his wife for the last 15 months because of COVID. Tony was denied SCCP for his last 6 months. Out of 30-something years he requested 6 months of reentry. The department of punishment told him no.

My son's name is Brandon Brown. He has been in prison since 2009 because of a terrible mistake he made when he was 21—Brandon caused another man great harm. Not only has he taken responsibility for his actions, he has spent the last 12 years in prison trying to become more than his mistake. Brandon has earned 3 college degrees and is now finished with his first year as a Ph.D. student; he is a certified yoga instructor, a hospice volunteer, a mentor, a tutor, a trained facilitator of restorative justice processes; I could go on. My son has a huge community ready to welcome him home and support his reentry as allowed by

the existing legislation, but because of its inadequacies and in light of all the evidence we have seen for over a decade, he will be denied. Despite the fact that transitioning to SCCP would greatly assist him in his studies and provide him a structured reintegration into society after spending his entire adult life incarcerated, I have no hope he will be accepted into the current program.

The DOC does not currently use evidence, data, statistics, or any measurable information to make informed decisions regarding SCCP. The current legislation results in short term offenders with no track record of change, or concrete need for reentry, to spend 20-30% of their prison sentence in the community. On the other hand, individuals like Pat, Tony, and my son, who spend decades making the decision to grow and change, are denied the opportunity to spend 3-5% of their sentence reintegrating into a world that is now wholly unfamiliar to them. Think about the message this sends into our prisons. It tells those who need to change that it is not worth the effort. It prevents people who have no idea how the world has changed from reintegrating back into it, it creates anxiety and uncertainty in prisoners as their release approaches, and is clearly part of the reason that recidivism remains so high.

You all are charged with overseeing criminal justice and protecting public safety. Voting "No" on this bill is to accept inadequate processes of reentry which jeopardize safety in our communities and shows our prisons are warehouses instead of places of rehabilitation. If we refuse to assist those offenders who have demonstrated the highest levels of growth and change, then why would we expect anyone to try? This bill **IS** a matter of justice and safety. If we refuse to pass it then we must take personal responsibility for the cycles of recidivism and harm that continue to plague our communities. When we allow offenders the opportunity to change and then provide them with necessary reentry opportunities, we set them up to become productive members of society. This is what we owe to victims of crime and the communities that prisoners will return to whether we assist them or not. Please vote yes on this bill.