

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Wendy Smith and I am currently incarcerated at The Southern Maine Women's Re-entry Center in Windham, where I am serving a 5 ½ year sentence. I am writing in full support of LD 1593.

As you all may or may not know, Supervised Community Confinement is the only form of re-entry we have in the state of Maine. For many of us, we will be being released with no probation after our sentence is complete. That is a scary feeling. A lot changes in the world at a rapid pace, especially when you have been inside the prison walls for an extended period. Many of us long timers get denied for reasons such as community sentiment, history of probation, or victims impact. At no point does what we have done to rehabilitate while inside play a factor in the decision for approval or denial. If we get denied, which we usually do at the maximum allotted time by the facility, there is no written reason, giving us areas that need to be improved in order to meet the qualifications. That is super frustrating.

The way the good time is dispersed, we are eligible at 18 months at our current release date. This date shifts every month, allowing for errors, which we see a lot of. This also means, that if by some miracle we get approved at the maximum time, our time to reintegrate successfully is only around 14 months. Usually, we are told by the facility that it is too much time and to try again at around 12 months, leaving us with 9 months to establish healthy routines, form the positive supports and connections that we need to live a healthy, successful life upon release from the program. If we move the time allotment up to 24 months, and change the way the good time is dispersed, this will allow enough time to form this healthy lifestyle that we need, and develop a "normal, natural" routine that will be comfortable after the program ends. After all, we still will be finishing our sentence, just in the community, at home with our supports and loved ones, learning to live again while having the structure and accountability of being monitored closely by a probation officer.

I know for me, there is no more that I can do inside this facility but time. I have earned over 100 certificates, some Nationally recognized. I am finishing up my college degree, I established a non-profit organization while inside to assist the women that are incarcerated with pursuing higher education, relieving some of the financial barriers that we often face, and I have gotten involved with every outside organization that the facility would allow, to the fullest extent. I have focused on my recovery and rehabilitation, making that my first priority, basically using the re-entry center for what it was designed to do, rehabilitate. Now, I am a sitting duck, surrounded with the negativity, in this harmful environment, trying to find ways to continue my journey until my eligibility comes for the SCCP program, (which I have been told multiple different dates, due to the way good time is calculated) If this bill is passed, I will be eligible immediately, as will other wonderful women that have worked just as hard as I have to become who they are today. The facility would have to honor the laws put in place, letting go of their own bias opinions on what is too long of time for people to be on the SCCP program, and being forced to look at the data that shows that one is ready for the next step in their journey.

I am asking you today to please help us continue our path to rehabilitation, re-entry and reintegration by implementing this bill into law. It is life changing for us that are inside these walls waiting to put our positive change into our communities, reconnect with our families, and prove ourselves worthy of a successful future.

Thank you, Wendy Smith #94115