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Public Testimony in support of LD 178

Hello – My name is Martha Bentley and I am writing today in support of LD 178 – An Act To Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community. Maine is currently spending an inordinate amount of financial and human resources on keeping people incarcerated. We simply cannot afford to continue doing so.

With LD 178 - An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community - Maine can reestablish a mindful pathway to earned, discretionary release that offers dignified second chance opportunities, increases to the workforce, and expansion of the tax base. It provides the needed guardrails to public safety by combining incentivized rehabilitation with frequent risk assessment and reentry oversight.

In 2020-21, I served as Director of Economic Development Coordination for the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. My job there was to oversee the implementation of the 10-Year Strategic Plan that calls for 75,000 new workers by 2030. These workers must come from everywhere and we cannot afford to overlook those who are currently incarcerated as a key worker demographic. Maine uses the tagline “Welcome Home” and this should also apply to returning citizens who have been rehabilitated and already punished for their crimes. Parole offers us the opportunity to do so.

According to Prison Policy Initiative, Maine has an incarceration rate of 328 per 100,000 people, locking up a higher percentage of its population than almost any democracy on earth. This is not the Maine I believe in. I believe in a Maine that offers second chances, dignity, personal transformation, and healing. I also believe in a Maine where logical and realistic solutions to problems can be offered and embraced. Maine has a huge aging population and workforce problem, and locking away workers who could be in service to the economy makes no sense.

People granted parole are 36 percent less likely to return to prison compared to those released with zero supervision. With this statistic, coupled with the need for more workers to be available in Maine, parole makes good policy and business sense.

Those who earn parole do so via taking a hard look at themselves, seeking forgiveness for their actions, and committing to doing better. We need to be a State that allows this to happen via reinstating a parole system.