

Larraine Brown
HIIT- AIme - Artivism in Maine
LD 178

Honorable Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

I strongly support LD 178, an act to support reentry and reintegration into the community.

I am Larraine Brown, a former Executive Director at the Restorative Justice Project, and through Volunteers of America, AIme - Artivism in Maine, and HIIT - Helping Incarcerated Individuals Transition I have taught inside several of Maine's jails and our reentry center in Belfast. Through trusted friends and my own inclinations I have developed close working relationships with many dozens of residents at The Maine State Prison.

It is by way of my work and the camaraderie and relationships that are established and take root that I have come to see the dire need for LD178 to pass.

What works? Punishment or rehabilitation? We have ample evidence that rehabilitation is a motivating factor in reducing violence inside and outside prisons and jails. What may be a less known fact is that the systemized commitment to treat prison residents with dignity and respect and to provide meaningful educational and work opportunities leads to much lower recidivism rates. People don't return to jail, they don't commit more crimes when they are treated with respect and given real opportunities.

Are you concerned about people leaving prison via parole and continuing on in a life of crime? This is much less likely to happen if they have before them a community that is prepared to welcome them, a decent job opportunity and a safe place to live.

I emphasize unequivocally that it is absolutely possible to know who, when meeting freedom, is most likely to do well, who will flourish and who will contribute, if given the chance, to their families, their children, their workplaces and their communities.

We all are aware only too well of the grim indicators, the waving red flags that tell us that an individual will commit a crime and will be incarcerated. Poverty, lack of opportunity, abuse, class, race, mental illness, addiction, aces - adverse childhood experiences and circumstances. These are the harsh tools that have shaped the majority of the women and men who occupy Maine's prison cells. What is interesting and brimming with hope and possibility are the indicators to be found within the women and men who will leave prison and jail and who will reintegrate successfully. Those who show us they will do well if you give them the opportunity. They will contribute at work and in their communities in dozens of fields including the trades, so needed here in Maine, and education.

If you give them the opportunity.

If you give them the opportunity they will show you. As they will already have shown you if you look. The ones who are studying, mentoring, teaching others, leading and helping in every way they can. The ones who only seek to prove that they are better than the worst thing they ever did.

I urge you to support LD 178 for a safer, better, stronger Maine.

Respectfully,

Larraine Brown

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