

Testimony in Support of LD 178

Dear Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

My Name is Brad A. Chesnel, #4207. I am serving a Life sentence without the possibility of parole as it reads on my paper work. I came to MSP in 1997 and this year, I turned 50 years old. This is the first time I've ever been in prison and I'm never to be released.

I have done a tremendous amount of work within myself to overcome the depression of waking up in a prison cell day after day.

I have put myself into every program of change possible, to take me away from the irrational thoughts that played a role in me coming to this prison. The victim in my case was a friend, a co-worker, and a good citizen. What happened that day should have never happened. I apologize to God daily and ask for forgiveness for my actions on that day continuously. I could have done more to safeguard him from harm. I often ask God, to ask him, to think of forgiving me for not being there to protect him.

A lot of my days are spent serving others. I feel I have a purpose if I help others. So, when in fact I "lock back in" at the end of the day, I can reflect on a complete day of service to others. They say doing god's work is the hardest, and I agree.

I've been in this prison longer than I was ever free. To hear that Parole is back in the conversation for Maine, it shows me that there are people thinking into the future of how it will all end. Eventually most people will come home. However, "are they coming home right?" is the question. Parole to me is a rigid line to follow to gain an opportunity for release. It's also a complete guide of how to transition completely having an outline to follow. What Maine has now is a straight release. Straight from a prison cell to freedom. Wow. I think of it and sometimes I'm at awe. Even being released from a prerelease has been proven hard. Many return and say, "Brad, it's hard-- they don't really prepare you." I answer by saying that I wish I could earn that opportunity.

This year, I joined back into the college program. I enjoy it, although it was hard for me to get in given the belief that there is no sense to invest in me. I'm

sentenced to die here. However, I didn't let the return-on-investment theory stop me from attending. Similarly, I won't let this hearing be held without trying to express my heart's desire to fix what I broke so long ago. I honestly feel I could be an asset to the free world. The code says for lifers, not to keep their mind on the streets. My mind has always stayed on the streets. I've never forgotten any of it. I can be successful, and I can give back in many ways if given the chance.

This past week, there was a guest invited into the class over Zoom to talk about the parole bill. We learned that if this was to pass, it would affect everyone. So, I began to smile. But then, I learned that only the ones the bill will not affect is the Life Without Parole people who have this written within our paperwork. So, I asked if the language could be looked at within the bill. I would hope that myself and others like me would get that chance to step forward and ask to earn an opportunity for parole. Some people may look at parole as a ticket out. As a lifer, I look at Parole as a road map for the daily walk, giving me even more purpose to do more good things within this prison. Although helping others is a great thing, having something that may give me even more value and purpose is very important.

I understand I'm just merely a prisoner. However, I am a human being and I ask for the ability to earn a chance for the conversation of parole also. There is value within me, more than just walking, helping and working until my body is so old that I just die in the cell that I work so hard at staying out of. Ultimately, that's what will happen.

I express more remorse in my eyes then verbally and I hold deep emotion for what happened to my friend. Just the other day, I asked him to release me from my own conviction for not protecting him from harm as I said I would.

Parole to me is a piece the DOC is missing. There is always someone who says, "what about the victims' families?" and I agree. Of course, I have to think the victims' families would want that person to completely EARN! their freedom by transitioning from prison correctly and not just being released because your time is up.

Unless they are like me, they are coming home old, maybe wiser, but angry older people. Someone will have to oversee that with parole. Of course, there is none of that today. As I have said, I've never been to prison. I am not a saint in all of this and I take ownership of my actions. It took me a long time to be able to say

that. I hold a lot of resentment towards the one who hurt my friend. I walk past him daily. That's a testimony of my abilities and desire to be more.

I only hope someday someone sees my worth and affords me the opportunity to put it all on the table and ask for forgiveness.

I send my deepest respect to all who listened to my words. I also send all my love and support to the ones who are working diligently to present the human life behind the door. You are our champions in life. For you to take the time to create space in your hearts and minds to help us – it's both memorable and respected. In the end as we may lay in a hospice bed with tears in our eyes dying, I have to say we will remember this day that someone did try in fact present us in a light we have earned after all these years.

My apologies to all families affected in life by criminality. I task you to call upon me and I will work diligently to try and bring something forward to heal your hearts and minds. This day can be more than a refusal of a parole program in the end. Let's all grow and come together as one people as we started so long ago and fix this together. Many people view legislation as gospel. Although they are in a position of decision-making, they are all made up as one of us: the common person trying to do the right thing.

Parole is the right thing if you call this place the Department of Corrections. Parole release is the last part of a job well done. We were encased within a prison, learned, and now we have the opportunity to return under a guideline of success, not failure!

Respectfully,

Brad A. Chesnel Sr.

Maine State Prison