

Testimony of Steven Matthew Clark

LD 178 an Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community

March 13th, 2023

Maine Criminal Justice Committee

Dear Members of the Criminal Justice Committee,

My name is Steven Matthew Clark and I am writing to express my support for the LD 178. This bill would reinstate parole in Maine, a critical step in ensuring that individuals who have worked hard to rehabilitate and transform their lives would have the opportunity to rejoin society as productive and contributing members.

I have been incarcerated for the past 18 years, and during this time, I have worked hard to better myself and to contribute positively to the lives of others. I have earned an associate's degree, two Bachelor's degrees, a Master's degree, and am currently working towards a PhD. I am also a volunteer, tutor, and recovery support specialist, and have worked with hundreds of people helping them on their path to recovery and reentry.

Additionally, I have earned several professional certifications, and have made valuable connections with people who want to support me in my efforts to be a contributing member of society upon my release. I share all of this with you to emphasize the progress that can be made when incarcerated individuals are given the opportunity to work towards a better future.

In 2006, I was in a fight in my home in Portland Maine with someone who was once a dear friend of mine. I was under the influence and was dealing with great mental health challenges. My friend lost his life and I panicked. I had seen movies such as Shaw Shank Redemption that fostered a great deal of fear in my consciousness. That fear combined with the mental health and substance abuse all fueled panic and a lack of appropriate response.

Prison has created a space to dive within and look at the pain, trauma, and abuse that I had dealt with as a kid. I have had a chance to look at the wounded child that needed love and support and connect with that part of myself. The pain and trauma I felt were masked with substance use, toxic masculinity, risk taking. In prison, I have found recovery, treatment, and support to heal my mindset, heart, and the pain I had been carrying for years.

My life has changed significantly. I am vulnerable and can now talk about pain. I feel like I am responsible and now own my choices in a constructive and accountable way. I am able to share my heart and experiences with others. Furthermore, I use my lived experience as a way to connect with others and practice the spiritual philosophies that I have adopted.

Despite all of the growth I have made, I still face the harsh reality that without parole, I may never have the chance to rejoin society. I have met the woman I hope to spend my life with and

want to help my family and other individuals in prison find love and the encouragement to change. The path to true rehabilitation and reentry is through support and the chance to prove ourselves. Parole provides us hope and gives us something to work towards.

I believe keeping me in prison for more time prison is not the solution. Instead, I believe keeping me and others like me who have transformed their lives in prison will have an adverse effect. More years means more dissolved relationships, more depression, and more lack of being socially updated with everything that is happening out there. If you let me out as a contributing member of society who pays taxes, helps his family, and even helps my victim's mother we are embracing what justice is all about. Justice is not about punishment and extraordinarily long prison sentences. An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind. Justice includes forgiveness.

More than anything, I want to reconnect with my family and make up for lost time. I have missed so many important moments with my loved ones, and I am eager to rebuild those relationships and create new memories with them. I also have the opportunity to start a new life with the woman I love. I am ready to take on the responsibility of being a supportive partner, a good son, a helpful professional and contributing member of our community.

I understand that parole is not a guarantee of freedom, but I am willing to do whatever it takes to prove that I am a worthy candidate for release. I am committed to continuing my education and personal growth, and to using my skills and knowledge to make a positive impact on the world. I hope that you will consider reinstating parole in Maine, and that I will have the chance to show you that I am ready to be a productive member of society once again.

As a consultant and teacher, I would draw on my personal experiences to help others navigate the complex and often confusing process of reentry. I would work with individuals to identify their strengths and skills and help them develop a plan for achieving their goals. I would also provide practical advice on everything from finding housing and employment to accessing healthcare and social services.

In addition to one-on-one consulting, I would also like to develop educational programs to help people in prison and their families. These programs would be designed to provide practical information and guidance on a range of topics, from financial literacy and career development to mental health and addiction recovery.

Ultimately, my goal would be to help people who are currently incarcerated or who have recently been released to not only survive but also thrive. By sharing my own experiences and insights, I hope to inspire and empower others to make positive changes in their lives and become active and engaged members of their communities.

I urge you to support LD 178 and to reinstate the parole system in Maine. Doing so would provide hope and opportunity for individuals who have worked hard to rehabilitate themselves, and would promote the values of justice and fairness. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Steven Clark
Warren
LD 178
Revised testimony