



March 13, 2023

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

My name is Kathy Durgin-Leighton, Executive Director of the Restorative Justice Project Maine and I urge you to vote in favor of passing LD 178, "An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community," into law. I am writing today on behalf of the Restorative Justice Project Maine whose Legislative Committee, made up of staff, members of the board of directors, and community members voted unanimously in support of reestablishing parole in the State of Maine. As its Executive Director, I am proud of Restorative Justice Project Maine's support of a process that opens a pathway to hope and healing for both the victim and the offender.

I am also writing as a resident of Maine. I am so strongly in favor of Parole that I am willing to share my own personal painful story. I am not stranger to violence.

Until the age of eight, I lived with a violent father who was physically and verbally abusive. No one was left unscathed including my mother, us children, and the pets. My early years were of violence and terror until my mother was able to gather up the strength to remove him from the home.

As a young mother preparing for work one morning, my neighbor broke into my home carrying a loaded shotgun in search of his estranged wife. He threatened my life and the life of my eighteen-month child. We hid in fear until he left. Thankfully, we survived physically unharmed.

Despite the violence that I have experienced, I am a firm believer that locking someone up for long periods of time without hope, rehabilitation, or opportunity for healing is not the answer. The person who threatened my life suffered from mental illness. My father was an alcoholic and a victim of his own upbringing. Our response to crime by locking someone up, removing them from society, isolating, and punishing offers little for the person who was harmed or for the person who caused the harm.

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Parole provides a rehabilitative path toward reintegration into the community. Currently, when a person has served their time and is released, there are no safeguards for the community and no support to the person entering the community. The absence of parole offers no incentive for rehabilitation and perpetuates further harm.

If combined with restorative practices, parole offers opportunity for transformative change for the person who caused the harm, and real healing for the person who was harmed. These practices are intended to promote healing and, as such, the future safety and well-being of all affected individuals.

I urge you to support LD 178 for the benefit of all citizens in the State of Maine. Thank you for your consideration.

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