

Tasha Graff  
Portland  
LD 178

Dear Committee Members,

I write to you with strong support for LD 178. I write as a concerned citizen, as a 16-year veteran public school teacher, as someone who holds a doctorate in public policy from USM, and as a human being who believes in redemption.

Throughout my career as a teacher in Maine, I have worked with close to two thousand teenagers from every walk of life and every day, despite the challenges presented in my line of work, I am reminded of the essential humanity of every child sharing my classroom. I teach students who have been incarcerated as children at Long Creek, I teach students who have family members currently incarcerated, I teach students who have survived violent crimes, and I teach students lucky enough to be strangers to the criminal justice system. I teach students who have escaped violence in their home countries to find safety in Maine. All of these children share commonalities: they all deserve a safe future, they all deserve to live in a society that values growth, and they all deserve to live in a society that believes in second chances. Every child deserves to know our state sees value in every member of our community as a human being, that we believe in redemption, that we know that a person's darkest decision does not define the entirety of their life.

Forty seven years have passed since Maine abolished parole. I would like to think that in the swath of time since 1976 we have grown as a state, that our public policy has become more inclusive to reflect a changing society. We have changed discriminatory laws in order to make our State more inclusive. We have welcomed New Mainers into the fold. We are working to attract people to our state and into our workforce. We are working to create educational opportunities in our community college and university systems that remove financial barriers for higher education. Surely we can also offer an opportunity for rehabilitation to those who are incarcerated, not just because it is an economically sound idea for the state but because it is a call to our highest ideals and morals to not only believe in redemption, but to pass legislation to put redemption into practice.

Let Maine be a beacon for justice, for hope, and for redemption.

Sincerely,  
Tasha Graff, PhD