

Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH

IN SUPPORT OF LD 178

An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community

Presented by Senator Beebe-Center of Knox

Before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, March 13, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Lani Graham I am a former Chief Public health Officer for Maine. I live in Freeport.

I could not be with you in person because I am down with Covid and still quite sick.

I start by saying that I have never been in prison, never been arrested, and as far as I know no member of my family has ever been in prison or arrested. We are lucky family. I could spend the rest of my time describing the many forms of our good luck, some of which may coincide with the ways your own families are lucky. But there is no time for that.

But I do want to mention that I have been the victim of two violent criminal attacks which resulted in numerous interviews with police. My attackers were never caught. I wanted them caught to save others from my experience, but also with the hope of reform. I wanted accountability, but also hope for change.

Due to the tremendous good luck I have had in my own life, terrible mistakes I have made, which could have ended tragically, possibly with the death of another person, have ended without incident. Surely that has happened to some of you. You drive when you shouldn't, you allow yourself to be distracted behind the wheel of a car, or you leave a loaded gun unattended. I ask you to consider if you have ever had such experience and what you would want for yourself or your own family, were such a mistake to have ended badly.

Having had the option of listening to the testimony, the objections seem to flow along two lines—the rights of victims with particular mention of “truth in sentencing” and the concept that Maine’s current system of supervised community release is sufficient.

It seems like the first reason, the rights of victims, can be worked through with some of the victims at the table. But of course, you cannot satisfy all victims. Some victims want every ounce of punishment that the state will allow, and others take a different view, as I did. Some are traumatized by every thought of the crimes committed, and others find relief in forgiveness. It will be impossible to find the perfect balance, but perhaps a mix of victims at the table can help.

I have spent a little time looking at the “Truth in Sentencing” laws around the country and found that there are states that have both “Truth in Sentencing laws” and parole. Keeping to small states, comparable to Maine, North Dakota and Maine have both reached 85% of truth in sentencing, but North Dakota has Parole and Maine does not.¹

Regarding the second argument, the current pathways are sufficient. In 2018, Vermont, a relatively liberal state, and Wyoming, a relatively conservative state, both had hundreds of inmates on parole in contrast to Maine’s less than 100.²

LD 178 has good practical reasons to support it, but it also offers Maine the chance to take a step toward a more humane and restorative system that offers better chances for redemption. I hope you will support this bill unanimously ought to pass.

¹<https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/tssp.pdf>

² <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/>