

Leo Hylton
Warren
LD 178

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

My name is Leo Hylton, I am a resident of Maine State Prison in Warren, and I have been incarcerated for almost 15 of my 32 years of life.

I am writing to you today to show my absolute support for LD 178 and the effort to re-establish parole in Maine.

As a 16 year-old boy, I had grand dreams of becoming a psychologist for boys in the foster system. I was hoping to be for them what I never had: someone to be able to look them in the eyes and say truthfully, "I've been there. I have been hurt, scarred, and traumatized in ways that defy words. I have been there, and I will be with you. For as long as you need me."

I wanted to be a mechanism of healing derived from a young life of pain.

Then, nearly as soon as I became an adult myself, this dream died with me. Thinking I had everything under control, I broke into a home, and nearly killed two people.

Before opening that door, I was a big, bad, scary grown man. I was so arrogant in my assurance that I could scare an older man into opening his safe without violence, that my young mind could not conceive of the idea that I controlled absolutely nothing.

Instead, the alarm went off, my mind broke, and I nearly killed two people. This is the reality that I live with every day. This is the harm that I cannot undo, the harm that I strive everyday to counterbalance.

And yet I know the scale does not exist. No matter what I do, what I have done cannot be undone. And within the current criminal legal system, I have no avenue of restoration or repair available. To directly seek forgiveness and repair is to break the law and ask for the other 40 years hanging over my head to be added to the 50 that I'm currently serving.

My hope and prayer is that parole will open the door for me to pursue this reparative action. With the help of fellow prisoners, staff members, and administrators who have defied the system, I have been able to heal, grow, and work to educate myself. I have attained my GED, associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees in spite of a system that initially told me my life was over. I have been accepted into a PhD program and intend to start in the fall, which includes serving as an associate director of a center for reconciliation.

My life's focus is creating avenues of meaningful accountability that support healing, repair, restoration, and transformation. From the confines of my cell, my ability to serve my community in this way is stifled.

My humble plea is that you would each vote unwaveringly in support of LD178.

Please, create this restorative, supportive, and truly victim sensitive parole system that has been painstakingly designed in accordance with the expert testimony delivered over the course of the Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole last fall. This one bill addresses three of the Commission's six recommendations. The commission has asked you to re-establish parole by a strong majority. I reiterate that request with my whole heart.

With deep gratitude and respect,

Leo Hylton