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I have been volunteering at the Maine State Prison for the past 4 years, off and on due to Covid restrictions. In that time I have met many residents - residents who are making good use of their time by going to school, training dogs, tending gardens and beehives, tending to the needs of dying residents, communicating with people interested in prison reform, practicing yoga and meditation, and learning to respect themselves and others. I believe that a parole system would not only help motivate the incarcerated to take part in the programs offered, but help orient them back into society upon their release. Parole would give the newly released a set system of support, which at the moment is haphazard at best.

I know that many of the crimes committed by the residents were horrific. There is no denying that. Certainly victims should have a say in whether the person who committed the crime should be released before their sentence is completed. But I also think that those affected by the crime should have a chance to hear what the incarcerated person has been doing or not doing with their time in prison before making their judgment. The key to parole working well will be an informed parole board well versed in restorative justice, and parole officers who can help their clients get on their feet, keep close track of their behavior, and refer them to services that they may need.

I feel prison can be a useful tool to changing the trajectory of a person's life and the life of the community if the right actions are taken - if rehabilitation is the goal, not punishment. Parole is an important step in rehabilitation. It gives incarcerated individuals hope that if they work hard to make positive changes in prison and become accountable for their actions, that they may be able to shorten their sentences and go step-by-step back into family and community life, instead of being suddenly dropped back into their community without a net after living away from society for far too many years. In other words, parole is about hope and second chances. Don't we all want that?