

Norman Kehling
HIIT Helping Incarcerated Individuals Transition
LD 178

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

I strongly support LD 178 to re-establish parole in Maine.

Norman Kehling here, I am sixty four years old and I spent thirty of those years incarcerated, seven in segregation. I entered The Maine State Prison with a seventh grade education. Two weeks after I left I attended a ceremony at the University of Maine to pick up my BA. My lawyer was there with me, a man who had stayed by my side for more than twenty two years, providing his kindness, his care and his skills pro bono.

I have been a free man for five years and during that time I founded HIIT -(Helping Incarcerated Individuals Transition) and I have have worked tirelessly to improve environments in Maine's prison and jails and to positively support, prepare and affect our communities that will be greeting women and men when they reenter.

Several days before I left Maine State Prison men (longtimers) gathered with the intention of making sure that 'no matter what you are faced with Norman, no matter how difficult or lonely it gets, please remember you represent all of us. Do well, do your best because we're here, we're working hard every day and one day we will be out there with you. Don't make it harder with your actions.'

Not many days go by that I don't repeat those words to myself. Spoken by my mentors and teachers, many of them still incarcerated, waiting for their chances at a 'second chance'.

Why should these men and women be given a second chance?

You already know that reestablishing parole is sought by the general public and that it will ultimately save money for Maine. Statistics indicate that, when applied correctly, it will also make our communities healthier and safer.

But really why?

Because it is our obligation as humans to know that change is possible and that redemption is worth working for. It is our obligation to know that when our fellows have been rightfully judged for the worst thing they have ever done it is upon us to know that with hard work and focus those same people can change, can contribute a great deal to our communities and to their families and their children's lives, to society as a whole. It is our obligation not to throw them away, not to dispose of us, but to make a system that supports redemption and change.

Women and men can and should earn their chance at parole by addressing the actions and crimes that brought them to prison. Many are doing just that every hour of every day spent in prison. They are teaching, learning, mentoring, helping in hospice and to train dogs, working to get their bachelors and masters degrees and their doctorates. They are taking woodworking, welding, electrical courses and in some cases they are teaching college courses and establishing organizations for change.

Reestablishing parole provides hope and therefore change in a place where change is most needed.

Please vote in support of LD178 and add the requirement 'An inmate who satisfies all criteria for parole eligibility could be paroled even though He or She is subject to an immigration and naturalization service detainer' This provision will allow non-citizens, as well as citizens, to participate in the parole process.

Respectfully,
Norman Kehling
HIIT- Helping Incarcerated Individuals Transition
PO Box 1090
Belfast
Maine 04915