

Jena Kitchen
Think Peace Learning & Support Hub
LD 178

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

My name is Jena Kitchen and I am a resident of Henrico County, Virginia. I work for Think Peace Learning & Support Hub and am a current graduate student at George Mason University's Carter School for Peace & Conflict Resolution, focusing on trauma-responsive leadership. While I am not from Maine, I have become friends with Leo Hylton, a currently incarcerated person in Maine State Prison. We have shared many classes together and also work together at Think Peace Learning & Support Hub. I had the opportunity to visit him in person at Maine State Prison in summer 2022.

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

I support this bill because of Leo Hylton. He is an exemplary citizen who has overcome tremendous obstacles and a traumatic history to become a vibrant mentor, social activist, kind leader, and trauma healing advocate. His efforts to reform our criminal justice systems from within, advocating for a restorative justice approach where prisoners are treated as fellow human beings, held accountable, while also journeying toward holistic healing has shown me a new vision of what is possible for reforming our criminal justice system. Through Leo, we have heard stories of other prisoners who, like him, have overcome immense barriers - often set in place by the criminal justice system itself - to lean into healing and hope for a new community where justice truly is given to all.

Re-establishing parole gives appropriate and warranted incentives toward prosocial behaviors, giving positive reinforcement for healthy choices. Trauma can never be healed in isolation. Safe, supportive community is one of the core central tenets for trauma healing and to break the cycle of violence that these prisoners can often be part of themselves. Harming others can be a source of trauma for the victim-survivor(s) yet harming others also causes trauma to the perpetrator-offender as well. Parole gives the opportunity for supportive community members to come alongside incarcerated people and instill a sense of hope and a renewed vision of what their future could be.

I urge you to support LD 178 as I do.

Sincerely,
Jena Kitchen