

Lori Swain
Cape Elizabeth
LD 178

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. My name is Lori Swain and I live in Cape Elizabeth. I am writing today in favor of LD 178, An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community.

I believe in rehabilitation, transformation, and that people can change. Sometimes we incarcerate someone for the worst thing they did in their life and stop there. There are men and women in our prisons and jails with long sentences who have made amends for their mistakes and turned their lives around. The current problem is that these people remain in prison because we don't have a system for them to be released when they are ready. We continue to pay thousands of dollars institutionalizing people who could and should be out in society making a positive difference.

I believe Steve Clark is a perfect example of someone who is ready to be a productive and important member of our society. I met Steve about 7 years ago. He's been incarcerated at the Maine State Prison for about 18 years now. He was young when he was arrested. He and his friend made a tragic mistake one night while under the influence, which ended with the death of his friend. Steve has regretted that night ever since. He's since asked for forgiveness and made amends for what happened that night. The mother of his friend has forgiven him and even visits Steve in prison. She sees the good man that Steve is and advocates for his release.

Steve is a bright and compassionate man who thinks of others before himself. He's dedicated his life to helping the men in the prison who are suffering the most, including my son whose lifelong mental health illness landed him in solitary confinement for about 5 years instead of getting the treatment we asked for and he desperately needed. Steve was his peer mentor and never gave up on him. He even offered to give up his honor cell to be in a cell next to my son when he was attempting suicide and felt hopeless. The prison didn't allow him to do that.

Steve has volunteered with AA and the hospice program and has spent his time furthering his education so he can continue to help others. He earned an associate degree, two bachelor degrees, and a graduate degree in psychology with a 4.0 GPA. He is now a PhD candidate and will start those classes in the summer. He trains others and runs groups to support the men in the prison. He also supports men who have been released from prison and connects them to resources "on the outside" in the hopes they will be successful. I've texted and talked to Steve while he cried because he wasn't allowed to meet with the men who needed his help many times. He hurts for those who are hurting and truly cares about others. He's helped others that the prison gave up on, even when it meant retaliation from some of the staff and administration. Steve feels that he could help these men so much better if he were in society. Steve is a good man who deserves a second chance. I proudly consider him a member of our family and love him like a son.

Steve currently works with a program called The Awakening. He's been offered jobs outside the prison to help others but he's not allowed to accept those jobs. He struggles to pay for his college education and would love to be out and working so he could support himself, further his ability to help others, and help his mother financially after she cashed in her retirement so he could take college classes while incarcerated. Steve has a purpose and a valuable life outside of prison, but he has no way to get there without the passing of LD 178. Please consider Steve and the many other men and women like him when deciding how to vote.