

March 12, 2023

Dear Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee (CJPS),

I write to ask that you reinstate parole in the state of Maine.

Before I met Steven Matthew Clark, currently an incarcerated person in the Maine State Prison System, I did not have much hope for the transformation of the United States (U.S.) criminal justice and prison systems. I had read about the transformative and humane approach practiced in other countries, such as Norway, but I always felt the U.S. was decades away from taking such steps. However, having met Steven, learned of his story, and seen firsthand the reform work he is engaged in, I have changed my mind. I am hopeful, now more than ever, that transformation is possible for both the individual and the correctional system, thanks to the work of the Maine Prison System.

I met Steven in September 2022 during an online facilitation training program. We participated in the same breakout room and supported each other around facilitation design. In the months since then, Steven's transformed life has testified to the redemptive power of a prison environment that fosters and supports repentance and transformation.

Many will share that parole will enhance Maine's economy. And they will share that offering an opportunity for a second chance in the form of parole to those who have taken responsibility for the harm they caused as they work toward repair is critical for rehabilitation, healthy families, community integrity, and public safety. Research has supported the validity of these assertions.

I also believe reinstating parole will further establish Maine as a leader in criminal justice and prison reform. Correctional programs here in the U.S. and abroad will run to Maine to learn from your model.

Indeed, justice must be served to help make whole those who were injured by the harmful actions of incarcerated people. At the same time, I ask the state of Maine to exercise mercy by reinstating parole, as the Maine State Prison residents said: "The opportunity to be considered for parole would allow us to demonstrate to society, and to those we harmed personally, our ability to grow, change, offer healing, and become contributing members of society."

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,  
April Thomas  
CEO