

Elizabeth Simoni
Augusta
LD 1633

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

My name is Elizabeth Simoni and I reside in Augusta. I am writing to express my strong support for LD 1633, An Act to Establish a Community-Based Reentry Program in All Department of Corrections Facilities.

I have worked in Maine's criminal justice arena since 1989. The struggles of individuals re-entering into the community following any period of incarceration have been deeply researched and well documented. I personally have seen the revolving door of re-incarceration when individuals being released were only given "fifty dollars and bus ticket". I have worked with people who have fatally overdosed within days of a release.

Conversely, I have seen the positive impact of second chances on individuals and their families when care and thoughtful planning are applied to a release opportunity. I have been impressed with the work that the Maine Department of Corrections has undertaken in terms of release planning and case management and am equally impressed with the "in-reach" that happens regularly through the work of fine organizations like the Maine Prisoner Reentry Network. Community, connection, and compassion make all the difference.

Establishing a community-based reentry program that coordinates directly with the Maine Department of Corrections will benefit those re-entering into the community, and Maine communities at large. The innumerable barriers and risks faced by individuals re-entering the community after a period of incarceration can be identified, addressed, and mitigated through this type of coordination. Housing, employment, transportation, relationships, health care, and substance use, and mental health treatment are ever-present impediments that can be addressed through the dual approach of trained, supervised individuals with lived experience working both in and out of facilities, whose efforts will naturally compliment the work and mission of the Maine Department of Corrections.

I respectfully request that the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety consider my testimony and pass LD 1633. This model will prove essential in providing the guidance and support needed for individuals to successfully reintegrate into society and reduce recidivism. It will also afford an opportunity to collect data on outcomes and can potentially save money that can be reallocated to other areas of need and investment.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth A. Simoni