

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

LD 1978 – Ought to Pass

An Act to Enact the Reentry Success and Earned Time Act

Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

January 17, 2024

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, greetings. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am Policy Counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, we urge you to support LD 1978.

According to the Justice Department, 71% of people released from prison are rearrested within five years.¹ Reentry programs are among the proven methods for reducing recidivism.² Considering the negative economic and social impacts of incarceration and arrest, the expansion, improvement, and clear publication of reentry programs will strengthen Maine's economy and make our communities healthier.

If passed, LD 1978 would establish in statute the reentry programs currently offered by the Department of Corrections; establish certificate programs for those reentry programs for any resident of the Maine State Prison; specify that a resident of the Maine State Prison may not be denied access to a reentry program based on the resident's actual or perceived race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin, age, or familial status; ensure that successful completion of a reentry program

¹ *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 34 States in 2012: A 5-Year Follow-Up Period (2012-2017)*, SUMMARY, NCJ 255947, July 2021, available at https://bjs.ojp.gov/bjs_pub/rpr34s125yfup1217/Web%20content/508%20compliant%20PDFs/rpr34s125yfup1217_sum.pdf

² Cannonier, C., Galloway Burke, M., & Mitchell, E. (2021). *The Impact of a Reentry and Aftercare Program on Recidivism*. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 48(1), 93-122.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0034644620973931> (finding that a certain reentry program reduced recidivism rates by almost 9 percent)

counts toward a resident's time served; and require the Department of Corrections to establish standards for successful completion of a reentry program.

During my visits to Maine State Prison, one of the most consistent grievances I hear from incarcerated people is a lack of clearly printed, publicized reentry programs and opportunities for earned time and good time. For people serving long sentences, these programs are among the few sources of hope, without which despair and discontent can quickly grow. This bill would begin to solve this and other problems by increasing the clarity and predictability of reentry programs. The passage of this bill would, in one fell sweep, relieve prison administrators of the burden of responding to queries about reentry, help educate incarcerated people about reentry, and increase the hope and well-being of prison residents. We urge you to vote *ought to pass*.