

Testimony in support of LD 1941 to the Judiciary Committee

January 8, 2026

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford. I have worked in manufacturing for over 40 years, and been a volunteer or full time educator in the carceral system for 20 years.

I am writing in support of LD 1941, An Act to Implement Recommendations of the Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole.

LD 1941 brings hope to incarcerated individuals by restoring the opportunity to earn parole. It also brings hope to families and communities across Maine. By encouraging rehabilitation, educational achievement, and personal accountability, this legislation supports public safety while strengthening Maine's social and economic well-being.

Parole is an earned opportunity to participate in a structured, rehabilitative pathway back to community life. Through a careful review by a panel of trained professionals, parole allows incarcerated individuals who have demonstrated growth and accountability to complete their sentences under Department of Corrections supervision while living with, working in, and supporting their families and communities.

The possibility of earning parole is a powerful incentive. It encourages meaningful participation in education, substance use treatment, counseling, and volunteer programs. This engagement helps create safer, more stable environments inside correctional facilities for both incarcerated people and staff, improving mental and physical health for everyone. Skills developed become permanent benefits to individuals, families and communities.

Research demonstrates that as people mature emotionally, intellectually, and socially through educational and rehabilitative programs, they also follow the well-established pattern of aging out of crime. The Vera Institute of Justice Report: [A New Paradigm for Sentencing in the United States](#) shows that *“People ‘age out’ of crime. Violent crime, measured by arrest rates, is much more prevalent among younger people from their late teens to early twenties. The rate of arrest for such crimes begins to sharply decline after this point and is more than halved by the mid-thirties. This means that people who commit crimes, even if they once presented a danger to others, may be safely released much before the end of the 20-, 30-, and 40-year or life sentences they are now serving.”*¹

¹ <https://vera-institute-files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/Vera-Sentencing-Report-2023.pdf>

A 2025 Sentencing Project report titled “[The Second Look Movement: A Review of the Nation's Sentence Review Laws](https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/the-second-look-movement-a-review-of-the-nations-sentence-review-laws/)” provides data showing “*Harsh sentencing policies, such as lengthy mandatory minimum sentences, have produced an aging prison population in the United States. Most criminal careers are under 10 years, and as people age, they usually desist from crime.*”² It notes a number of national organizations, The American Law Institute, The American Bar Association, and the National Academies of Sciences support the Second Chance opportunities that parole would provide. Another of their reports, “[Long-Term Sentences: Time to Reconsider the Scale of Punishment](https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/long-term-sentences-time-to-reconsider-the-scale-of-punishment/)” provides data describing “*There is also strong criminological evidence that lengthy prison terms are counterproductive for public safety as they result in incarceration of individuals long past the time that they have “aged out” of the high crime years, thereby diverting resources from more promising crime reduction initiatives.*”³ It also provides data on the increasing costs of an aging prison population, and specifically notes “the aging process leads to higher costs of incarceration, primarily due to increased health care needs.⁴ A person’s health generally declines more rapidly in prison.⁵ This is partly a function of the relatively inadequate access to health care services of many individuals before they came to prison, and partly related to the stressful environment of a correctional institution.”

A report issued by the [Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging](https://brookdale.org/fact-sheet-elder-parole-is-an-aging-issue/) described with detailed data and citations the human and financial cost of “accelerated aging”. “***The physical and mental stresses of living in the prison environment have created a health crisis in the prison system, with prisoners in their 50s exhibiting sickness and disability at a rate equal to that of community-dwelling people in their 70s and 80s. Prison health care systems are more equipped to address physical trauma rather than the management of chronic conditions associated with older age. As a result, many chronic conditions go untreated. People experiencing sensory and cognitive decline have a harder time following orders from prison guards, completing work assignments, and navigating the physical environment of a prison.***”⁶

Studies show that “*Each year that someone spends in prison cuts their life expectancy by two years. The abysmal state of health care behind bars bears much of the blame for those figures. Medical*

² <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/the-second-look-movement-a-review-of-the-nations-sentence-review-laws/>

³ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/long-term-sentences-time-to-reconsider-the-scale-of-punishment/>

⁴ McKillip, Matt & Boucher, A. (2018 Feb 20). [Aging Prison Populations Drive Up Costs](https://famm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Aging-Prison-Populations-Drive-Up-Costs- -The-Pew-Charitable-Trusts.pdf). Pew Charitable Trusts.
<https://famm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Aging-Prison-Populations-Drive-Up-Costs- -The-Pew-Charitable-Trusts.pdf>

⁵ McKillip, Matt & Boucher, A. (2018 Feb 20). Aging Prison Populations Drive Up Costs. Pew Charitable Trusts.
<https://famm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Aging-Prison-Populations-Drive-Up-Costs- -The-Pew-Charitable-Trusts.pdf>

⁶ <https://brookdale.org/fact-sheet-elder-parole-is-an-aging-issue/>

neglect kills hundreds of incarcerated people every year despite the 1976 Supreme Court ruling that deliberate indifference to medical needs amounts to cruel and unusual punishment.”⁷

Reinstating parole benefits both individuals and public-health by allowing people to return to the community while they are younger, healthier, and more capable of contributing positively.

Continued incarceration of aging or medically fragile individuals places a significant financial burden on the state through rising healthcare costs, while offering diminishing public safety benefits. **Parole prioritizes rehabilitation, fiscal responsibility, and community well-being.**

Maine needs a well-trained, educated, motivated, and dependable workforce. I recently spoke with a Rotarian who admitted she had been hesitant to hire someone who was formerly incarcerated. Her perspective changed completely once she did. She described how her employee became an exceptional worker and a trusted friend, and how that single decision proved to be a major asset to her business. Allowing incarcerated individuals to earn parole by meeting rehabilitative standards, completing educational programs, and obtaining vocational certifications enables them to successfully reenter the workforce and contribute both locally and nationally.

The US Chamber of Commerce has a wealth of information on “[The Workforce Impact of Second Chance Hiring](#)”. “*The numbers show that formerly incarcerated individuals want to work. More than 93% of formerly incarcerated individuals between the ages of 25 and 44, those in their prime working age, are actively working or looking for work.*”⁸

Their report points to a number of reports from businesses benefitting from hiring formerly incarcerated people, including [Jamie Dimon, CEO of JP Morgan](#) who “*reiterated his long-held view that skills are equally as important as education when it comes to finding the right candidate. And while hardships suffered previously in life may not be mentioned on a CV—a Harvard business degree would be displayed proudly—Dimon said that doesn’t mean these experiences should be discounted in the hiring process. Data from JPMorgan suggests that the bank has indeed uncovered a new talent pool. In 2023, 9% of JP hires in the U.S. had a prior record—which had no bearing on their roles. The year prior, the banking behemoth hired over 4,600 people with “criminal backgrounds”*”⁹.

The Chamber of Commerce believes in and sees the benefits of Second Chance Hiring to such a degree that they have developed an [Employer Guide](#). This guide informs businesses of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) to recoup some wages, federal fidelity bonding and the availability of Growth Opportunity Grants. It also described the positive working environment enjoyed by all employees stating “*in a recent survey, 66% of employees expressed pride in working for a company*

⁷ <https://www.vera.org/news/health-care-behind-bars-missed-appointments-no-standards-and-high-costs>

⁸ <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/data-deep-dive-the-workforce-impact-of-second-chance-hiring-3>

⁹ <https://fortune.com/2024/07/15/jamie-dimon-jpmorgan-hiring-employees-ex-felons/>

that offers training, guidance, or mentorship to individuals with criminal records to help them reintegrate into the workforce.”¹⁰

The Chamber also notes “[Data from SHRM](#) shows that 85% of human resources leaders and 81% of business leaders say that second chance hires perform the same or better than other employees.”. Their conclusion is concise: “Fewer taxpayer dollars spent on incarceration means more resources can be invested in the community.”¹¹

All of this certainly applies to Maine. Working locally also means spending locally and paying taxes. It means caring for family, possibly young children or aging parents in need of assistance. It means supporting Maine businesses and not national monopolies when purchasing toothpaste and soap, food, clothing, gas and coffee. The sooner a person may return to the workforce the greater generational wealth they can build for their family. An employer may be more inclined to provide advanced training and a path to advancement to someone they feel may be employed with them for a long period of time. A [Colby Laboratory for Economics Studies report from March 2023](#) begins with the unfortunate but well-known fact that “Ask any business owner from Kittery to Calais to Fort Kent about the biggest challenges they face today and virtually every one will say the same thing - they can't find people who want to work” and concludes with “According to our results, **an increase in Maine's workforce of 100 employees spread equally across these five industries would result in approximately \$14.7 million in increased economic activity. Roughly 43 other jobs would be supported by this output through indirect and induced effects on Maine's economy.**” Maine has a potential workforce that is well educated, skilled, and enthusiastic about work.

Reducing the prison population will also help Maine’s economy by reducing the need for excessive overtime pay in the Department of Corrections. This data compiled by state reports cited by [Maine Open Checkbook](#) shows that in 2024, 26% of Maine’s overtime pay was for the Department of Corrections, when the DOC represents 8% of state employees and 8% of Total Regular wages.

		Regular Wages		Overtime			
2024 Data	Maine Total	851,280,182.60		46,391,753.58			
	Total State Employees		16,732.00				
	MDOC Total	68,485,923.06		11,530,968.53			
	Total MDOC Employees		1,378.00				
	MDOC % of Maine	8.05%		24.86%			
	MDOC % of State Employees		8.24%				

¹⁰ <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/employer-guide-to-second-chance-hiring-programs-and-tax-credits>

¹¹ <https://secondchancebusinesscoalition.org/why-it-matters>

	Location	Total Regular Wages	% of MDOC Total	Total Overtime	% of MDOC OT	Employees	% of MDOC Employees
	Central Office	16,147,267.96	23.58%	731,093.18	6.34%	257.00	18.65%
	MCC	15,719,408.81	22.95%	2,936,695.29	25.47%	338.00	24.53%
	Charleston (MountainView)	9,440,364.68	13.78%	1,759,875.99	15.26%	163.00	11.83%
	Longcreek	6,419,430.95	9.37%	1,174,817.73	10.19%	186.00	13.50%
	MSP (and Bolduc?)	19,736,308.41	28.82%	4,790,128.45	41.54%	416.00	30.19%
	Downeast	1,023,142.25	1.49%	138,357.89	1.20%	18.00	1.31%
	TOTAL	68,485,923.06	100.00%	11,530,968.5	100.00%	1,378.00	100.00%

Fewer people in prison reduces stress on correctional staff, allows for more effective and productive programming, and fosters a stronger sense of purpose and improves mental and physical health outcomes for both staff and incarcerated individuals.

Having a family reunited is a cost savings in health care that can't be calculated, but is obvious. The stress of being incarcerated, and of having a parent or family member incarcerated is detrimental to the physical and mental health of everyone impacted.

This is described eloquently in a report released in January 2023 by Susan Howley, Project Director, Center for Victim Research at the Justice Research Statistics Association titled "[Reflections on Long Prison Sentences, A Conversation with Crime Survivors, Formerly Incarcerated People, and Family Members](#)". *As one survivor put it, "When a young person receives a sentence of more than 20 years, that young person and their family also lose that life-the community also loses that life."*

I urge you to read this report as it provides a **balanced, informed, and humane understanding of long prison sentences and their long-lasting impact on individuals and communities.**

I have been fortunate in my life to work alongside a remarkable group of inspiring women. During years of incarceration, through age spans when most people are building careers, families, and community ties, these women who were raised with no knowledge of opportunity fought for education, volunteered and supported one another, worked full time in every aspect of running the prison, and prepared themselves to return home. Today, they are productive role models in their communities.

They care for their children and aging parents, work full time, some multiple jobs, some jobs and continued education. They shop locally, and volunteer with AA, NA, faith-based, and other community organizations. Each of these empathetic, resilient, and extraordinary women earned the opportunity to participate in a parole program, and they are doing so with dignity, integrity, and exceptional success. Their families and communities are grateful to have them home.

It saddens me that, had they lived in Maine, these women would still be incarcerated. Maine's families and communities deserve the same opportunities to heal, rebuild, and thrive.

I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1941 and allow Mainers the chance to earn the opportunities that parole provides.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson

Sanford, Maine.

<https://vera-institute.files.svcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/Vera-Sentencing-Report-2023.pdf>

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/the-second-look-movement-a-review-of-the-nations-sentence-review-laws/>

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<https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/employer-guide-to-second-chance-hiring-programs-and-tax-credits>

<https://secondchancebusinesscoalition.org/why-it-matters>

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