

Peter Ryan

Testimony for Bill LD 1941

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My name is Peter Ryan, I am a current junior at Colby College who has spent the past year studying our criminal justice system. I've had the privilege of working with the Colby College Government Department, the Maine Indigent Defense Center, the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, and Parole4Maine, and have published an op-ed in the Bangor Daily News. I am here to speak in favor of LD 1941.

Imagine you are incarcerated. You decide that you want to change. You spend your time pursuing multiple advanced degrees to better yourself, you teach classes at local colleges to give back to your community, you begin wood carving and share your passion with others —yet when you apply for clemency, when you apply for a second chance, you are denied. Members of the Joint Standing Committee On Judiciary, unfortunately these stories are not fictitious, but the reality for many Mainers such as Brandon Brown, Leo Hylton, and Charlie Jones—who all share one thing in common—they were incarcerated, chose to change, and were denied a second chance at some point in their clemency review processes. I urge all of you to consider voting through LD 1941 An Act to Implement Recommendations of the Commission to

Examine Reestablishing Parole. This would not only give Mainers a second shot at life, but it would make the state safer. Studies conducted by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research show that incarcerated people who undergo parole programs are less likely to be convicted of a crime or face jail time within a year of their release—demonstrating that parole programs are effective.

The state of Maine consistently ranks around 39th for cost of living, 42nd for personal income, 43rd for business opportunity, 44th for job market, and 45th for economic outlook. Despite this, the Maine state government spends almost two hundred million dollars per year on incarceration facilities and an average of \$117,000 on each person they incarcerate. As our economic and living conditions continually rank as some of the worst in the nation—our state government pours hundreds of millions of dollars into a carceral system that has largely proven ineffective. It's time to try something new. LD 1941 not only advances criminal justice efforts, but it is economically advantageous for this great state. Parole would allow incarcerated Mainers' transformation to be recognized, creating more reform for an already broken and expensive system.

Maine's prison system has a history of abuse and embraces violence over meaningful rehabilitation. Approximately half of Maine's prison deaths

come as the result of an overdose or suicide—many of which were initially unreported. These people are Mainers too, and no Mainer should be treated this way. We must not abandon our community values when it comes to incarcerated people and should all be supportive of avenues such as parole which embrace justice and forgiveness over vengeance and punishment.

Forty-six out of the fifty US states have some form of a parole system. Maine has none. What do we want the legacy of Maine's justice system to be? How do we want our impact to be remembered? I urge all of you to vote through LD 1941 and consider reimplementing parole.