

Testimony in favor of LD 1941

To Whom It May Concern,

December 28, 2025

I have been incarcerated for twenty-four years for taking a woman's life. I took her from her two daughters, her parents and other family and friends. I also took myself away from my two sons and daughter, parents, and other family and friends. I caused indescribable heartache for so many people and it is something I live with every day. I have not and will never expect forgiveness. I do know that the person I am now is not the person I was at that time. So many aspects of my life back then are beyond understanding. At times it feels that it cannot be true.

How did I do something so horrible?

While locked behind cement walls and razor wire, I have ached for my children, lived with shame, and felt like a failure as a mother. I have spent times in very dark places, wishing I no longer existed and wondering if there will be a point when I will not be able to endure the pain. I have struggled to cope with what I have done, the damage that resulted, and the loss of freedom. However, I know that my crime does not define who I am. While I may be identified by a number, I am still a person and have much to offer society.

I have taken advantage of opportunities to learn about who I am and how to become the best version of myself. I have been continually involved in programming and have worked many jobs. I have participated in classes such as Anger Management, Victims Impact, Alternatives to Violence, and groups focusing on trauma, just to name a few. I learned how to hand sew quilts and cane chairs, worked as a counsel substitute, am a hospice worker, and even trained dogs for the Maine State Police. I am pursuing degrees in Justice Studies and psychology. I believe my purpose is helping others and advocating for those who have difficulty doing so themselves. I hope to be able to help incarcerated women while I am here, whether by finding ways to better cope with this difficult life or by assisting them in preparation for release. Eventually I would like to work with veterans who struggle with PTSD, substance use disorder and other challenges they face. I am a veteran myself, which is something I will always be proud of.

I currently work in the education department as a TA/Tutor for the Education Program Coordinator. I assist with educational and enrichment programming, help residents working on their HiSET, support the college transitions program, and aid prospective students through the process of preparing to pursue a higher education. I also volunteer to train service dogs for Mission Working Dogs, an organization founded and directed by Christy Garnder, a veteran who was injured during her time in service. I have been doing so for three years, training dogs to become not only a support for someone with PTSD and/or physical disabilities, but also their lifelong companions. Giving back in this way has become an important part of my life.

I have met people who genuinely wish to help us, whether to cope with grief, heal trauma, or find untapped talent such as creative writing or art. These people treat us with care and respect and do not see us as disposable. Teachers, legislators, musicians, published authors, artists, speakers on topics ranging from religion to prison reform, and many others have walked through the door of this place to engage with us. They do not identify us by a number; they treat us like people who are being held accountable for mistakes and bad choices but are still human beings.

For me, parole would be a second chance at life. A chance to prove I am willing and able to be a productive member of society. A chance to hopefully make up for the time lost with children if they choose to have me in their lives again. A chance to spend time with my parents who are aging and in failing health. A chance to see my two grandchildren. I will always be faced with the fact that nothing I do in my future will make up for my crime, but I wish to give back and show that I have not spent my time feeling sorry for myself or being bitter about my situation. I have been a productive member of a community.

I am one of many women who are serving long sentences and have already spent years incarcerated but have used our time to prepare ourselves for success should we get the chance for early release. There will always be people who do not believe in rehabilitation for certain crimes and oppose parole and second chances. To those people, I ask "What if it were you?" "Would you want people to have faith that you learned, changed and are holding yourself accountable?" "Would you feel the same way if it was someone you loved - your mother, your child, your best friend? Would you want them to have a second chance?" We cannot predict our futures, even when living a "normal" life and have the best intentions. While it is hard to put yourselves in someone else's shoes, none of us knows what life may bring.

Laura L. Kirk