

Testimony in Support of Reestablishing Parole “LD 1941”

My name is Jeffery Witham. I am incarcerated at the Maine State Prison, and I am here to support LD 1941.

The state of Maine has been handing out longer sentences, and because of that the prison system is way overcrowded and understaffed. This puts a lot of mental stress on both staff and prisoners. Because of this stress, programs get canceled, outside reps can't come in, college classes get shut down, Hi-SETs don't happen, and jobs get messed up. Instead of working on ourselves, people are locked in their cells like caged animals.

All the hard work that guys have put in has come to a standstill. All the progress between officers and prisoners has gone backwards. That is not good. It is more counterproductive than most people know. It used to be that prisoners and officers didn't talk or interact at all. Then over time things got better. We could talk, shake hands, eat together, and play sports together. That is called humanization. And now it feels like that is leaving again. It is not good we are going back to being warehoused instead of being productive.

Bringing back parole would help relieve a lot of this stress between staff and prisoners. It would open things back up. It would give hope to the ones who have put in the work, the ones who have changed, grown up, and have owned their guilt, instead of letting it run their life they used to help them better oneself. I am not saying everyone should get out but at least give people a chance to earn a hearing and sit in front of a parole board.

I have seen firsthand how bad things have gotten. I had to file a Rule A-D-C with the courts just to get help accessing everyday resources that are supposed to be available. Because of all the “lock ins, it took me almost a year to file an insurance claim that should have taken a week or a month at most. That is how backed up everything is.

Here at Maine State Prison, we are staffed and equipped for a certain number of people, and the food budget is based on that number. In the past 6–8 months, around

300 people were sent here, but no extra money came with them to feed us. This system is beyond overwhelmed and overpacked.

The Maine Department of Corrections is at a standstill. Reestablishing parole would reduce overcrowding, lower stress, and help bring back programs and accountability. It would help people who are ready to change keep moving forward instead of being stuck.

I respectfully ask you to support LD 1941 and bring parole back to Maine.

Thank you for listening.

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