

Statement in Support of LD 178

An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration to the Community

I am Richard Harburger and I strongly support this proposed legislation.

I come before you as the Chair of the Maine Parole Board and have served on this Board for twenty four (24) years. My employment history involves fifty-two (52) years in law enforcement here in the State of Maine. I have served as a police officer, deputy sheriff, a state probation/parole officer (10 years) and a federal probation/parole officer (20 years). I possess two undergraduate degrees along with a masters degree. I have taught classes in criminal justice, corrections and behavioral sciences at Husson University and the University of Maine for over 15 years. All of my training, employment and education tell me that parole is a worthwhile endeavor.

I have read the proposed legislation and believe that it represents a fair and just process for the safe release of inmates who meet conditions allowing for early community release. My history here in Maine shows me that parole or reentry and reintegration to the community works and allows for a reduction in recidivism when the parole plan is collectively created and executed by all the parties involved.

I also believe that this legislation allows for the victim of the original crime to have significant input into the parole process and allows for some degree of restorative justice within the community upon release.

It is in everybody's best interest to construct a program that creates an incentive to the process of change. The inmate will now see a concrete way to shorten his sentence by working within the system rather than to just "wait it out" until release. History has shown us that the longer an inmate remains in jail the more likely it is that that inmate will return to the criminal justice system.

Maine is one of 16 states that does not utilize parole. This needs to change. Parole will offer a more positive outlook to Maine's correctional population and add an important "safety net" to released individuals who may need assistance once outside the institutional walls.

As written, I find several points that need to be readdressed in this LD. I realize that any future working group will undoubtedly make changes to this bill, I want to note three specific and important items that should be addressed.

1. Although not addressed in this LD, the parole board would need to be full-time. There are too many functions and processes that need to be completed by a part-time parole board (which is what the law allows presently). Due to the size of the state and the location of the various institutions, I would also suggest that individual parole board members or sub groups be authorized to grant parole under certain circumstances (this practice was allowed for in the Colorado Model that was referenced at the Commission hearings).
2. I question the amount of time that is reflected in sub. 5823 (1)(A) Parole of Prisoners I personally believe that one third (1/3) will be a hard sell to people of Maine. I would suggest that one half (1/2) would be more reasonable.
3. I am concerned that sub. 5828 Discharge from Parole does not give the Board the ability to discharge a parolee prior to completion of sentence for specific cause. There are instances where supervision is no longer necessary and it may be in the best interest to terminate supervision (parole) upon motion to the Board. The Board needs this option.

I thank the Criminal Justice Committee for the opportunity to address these issues and will now answer questions that may arise from my presentation.

Thank you

Richard Harburger, Chair

State of Maine Parole Board

Brewer, ME
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