



Testimony before the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
LD 178 An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community
March 13, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and Members of the Committee:

I am Rev. Jane Field, the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches, an ecumenical coalition of seven member-denominations and two associate member congregations who together represent 437 local churches in Maine with 55,000 parishioners in their care. I am testifying on behalf of the Council **in support of LD 178.**

Through the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (one of our official and trusted partners), we learned about the Parole4ME organization. When I visited their website, I was struck by how much of the language they use would sound right at home in one of our member churches—words like “redemption,” “hope,” “restoration,” “community,” and “transformation.”

Churches use words like these because our faith-based moral compass points us toward affirming the inherent worth of every human being, toward sustaining a fundamental commitment to the dignity and humane treatment of everyone in our society, including those who are incarcerated, and toward advocating for justice and compassion in our social order. In the case of the criminal justice and corrections system, that translates to our advocacy for practices that address the hurts and the needs of victims, offenders, and communities in such a way that *all three* might be healed. And we believe parole can accomplish that.

This position is nothing new for people of faith. The sacred texts of the churches in our coalition (i.e., Hebrew and Christian scripture, which are thousands of years old), mention prison and prisoners no fewer than 121 times: “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them” (Hebrews 13:3); “God has called you to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (Isaiah 42:6-7); “God has anointed us to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners (Isaiah 61:1).

So, it should come as no surprise that we, the Maine Council of Churches, along with one of our member denomination’s advocacy arms, MUUSAN (Maine Unitarian Universalist Social Advocacy Network), stand with the Maine Legislature’s Commission to Examine Reestablishing Parole and their November 2022 recommendation that parole return to Maine. In calling for the re-establishment of parole, they, and we, are calling for nothing less than the re-establishment of hope as we give incarcerated Mainers an opportunity to contribute to the repair of our communities and give all concerned a chance at redemption.

We are convinced that LD 178 would establish a parole system that is sensitive to the stated needs of victims and survivors of crime, that incorporates restorative justice practices and processes, and that supports the successful reentry and reintegration of incarcerated people to their outside communities.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote Ought To Pass on LD178. Thank you.