

Testimony of Linda M. Pistner, Deputy Counsel to the Governor

on

**L.R. 3255, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice System
Advisory Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force**

Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

March 4, 2020

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am Linda M. Pistner, Deputy Counsel to Governor Janet T. Mills and I am here today to present testimony on L.R. 3255, “An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice System Advisory Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force,” on behalf of the Departments of Corrections, Health & Human Services and Public Safety.

These departments, particularly DOC, provided innumerable hours of assistance to the Task Force consultants, explaining programs, answering questions and delivering data and records. All have been working to improve outcomes for juvenile justice involved youth, planning for the long term and building a system that will better serve our children.

Attached to this testimony is a summary of actions taken over the past year by DHHS, DOC, DOE, DOL and DPS to strengthen Maine’s systems and divert those facing behavioral health challenges from the criminal justice system, both adults and children. These departments have been working collaboratively in many areas. The Children’s Cabinet, with its dual focus on our young children and those 14-24, is a significant example of how this administration has harnessed the energy and expertise of programs that serve children across departments.

One major initiative deserves mention here: the Office of Children and Family Services within DHHS has initiated planning for implementation of a new Federal Act referred to as Families First. Many preparatory steps have been taken over the past year to meet the eligibility standards for Families First, including some statutory changes. We believe that by October 2021, the state will have a federally approved plan which will enable Maine to access new federal funds to support an expansion of services to children and families, including greater access to evidence-based programs such as Functional Family Therapy or “FFT,” Multi-systemic Therapy or “MST,” and others. These are costly but effective programs that are home-based and proven to achieve the best results to keep families together and youth safely in their communities.

The Report prepared for the Task Force by the Center for Children’s Law and Policy, a national consulting firm based in Washington, D.C., describes numerous actions taken and in process by DOC and by DHHS. The DOC is committed to working with child serving state agencies, community providers, and other stakeholder to address the short- and long-term actions

described in the CCLP report. Implementation of many of these recommendations is already in progress and illustrates the administration's continuing effort to reduce the use of secure confinement for youth by increasing and improving community-based programming and by expanding services to children and families so that children do not enter the juvenile justice system in the first place.

We have questions and concerns with certain provisions of this bill. We have been in touch with Rep. Brennan and look forward to continuing our discussions with him and the committee.

Thank you.

Reaching Maine People At Risk and In Crisis

Maine people should have access to mental health and substance use disorder interventions and treatment at the right time and in the right settings. While long-term strategies are being developed to strengthen Maine's systems and divert people facing behavioral health challenges from the criminal justice system, we cannot wait. This is why in the first year of the Mills Administration, numerous actions have been taken.

Actions to Date (DHHS, DOL, DOC, DOE and DPS)

Adults

Prevention and Diversion

- \$3 million crisis center pilot (consent decree funding)
- Up to \$750,000 for medication management workforce development and increasing clients served (consent decree funding)
- \$700,000 in the biennial budget to create a dedicated crisis intake unit for adults with developmental / intellectual disabilities, which takes strain off of the mental health crisis system
- Attended mental health dockets
- \$1.5 million in the biennial budget to support pre- and post-arrest Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion programs
- Streamline eligibility process for Community Integration

Treatment and Intervention

- Expanded MaineCare, which has provided mental health treatment to more than 16,000 Maine people and substance use disorder treatment to more than 6,500 Maine people
- Update behavioral health homes in MaineCare
- \$5.5 million in the biennial budget for a new inpatient unit at DDPC
- Nearly \$10 million more in 2019 in Federal DSH funding with the recertification of RPC

Reintegration

- Created DHHS / DOC partnership: From June to November, 1,970 people assisted at intake on applying for DHHS benefits, with 496 leaving Maine State Prison with benefits (SNAP, MaineCare)
- Supported MAT in prisons, reentry work with Groups (98% attended first visit)
- Revised and improved protocols for intensive case managers
- Established Corrections Liaisons in each Vocational Rehabilitation office to promote smoother reentry to employment for those with disabilities exiting incarceration or on probation
- Piloted delivery of a Career Exploration curriculum at the Maine Correctional Center to build employment readiness skills for reentry to employment

Children

Prevention and Diversion

- Nearly \$3 million from Fund for Healthy Maine Opioid Funding for at-risk youth
 - Implement new DOE social emotional learning curriculum in 700 schools
 - Increase the number of schools implementing Second Step and Sources of Strength
 - Increase the capacity within school-based health centers to provide additional mental and behavioral health services, prioritizing high-risk youth
 - Collaboration between DHHS and the Department of Education to provide restorative practices support, education, and technical assistance
- Convened a Trauma Informed Task Force consisting of clinicians, educators, mental health agencies and administrators to identify and address needs for Trauma Informed Practices in schools across the state
- Addition of six new positions in DOE focused on prevention and support for schools
 - Social Emotional Learning / Restorative Specialist
 - Mental Health / School Counseling Specialist
 - Cultural / Family Engagement Specialist
 - School Safety Coordinator
 - School Safety Specialist
- Trauma Informed training and support for school districts to include MTSS development of identification of needs and appropriate response
- Convened a work group to explore the role and impact of School Resource Officers in supporting Trauma Informed Schools. (Goal of developing a model MOU)
- Created a position within DOC to create a Credible Messenger program. Credible Messenger Mentoring provides juveniles with a caring adult with similar life experiences to promote prosocial behaviors and relationships within the community.
- Cooperative Agreement between Muskie School of Public Health to strengthen administrative and cross system practice and measurement of results that contribute to youth justice reform and deepen gender and racial equity strategies.
- \$3.3 million HUD grant to New Beginnings on homeless youth (partnership with State agencies)

Treatment and Intervention

- Create, implement child behavioral health strategy, including immediate actions like revising the wait list process
- Developed a Model Discipline Policy for schools that emphasizes Restorative Practices to reduce the use of exclusionary practices and strengthen students' connection to their community
- In response to feedback from educators, DOE has scheduled a conference in January to support the development of a strategic approach to include Trauma Informed Practices in schools
- Development of new resources for technical support and training in Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Restorative Discipline, and other Trauma Informed Practices
- Partnered with AdCare and SAMHSA for Student Intervention Reintegration Program (SIRP) which provides education to at-risk youth around substance use
- At Long Creek Youth Development Center, Trauma-Response Training (contract with outside specialist to provide training for direct care and treatment staff)

Reintegration

- Opened Bearings House using MDOC staff for Community Custody males in a nonsecure community-based setting
- Contracted with Youth Advocate Program (YAP) to serve male and female youth transitioning out of Long Creek
- Awarded \$775,775 over three-years through Federal Second Chance Reentry Grant for youth reentering the community following secure confinement. The program will fund the following programs:
 - The Community Success Program (Bearings House)
 - Opportunity Scholars (\$31,000)
 - Muskie School of Public Health, Research and Evaluations (\$45,000)
 - Credible Messenger Programs (YAP, \$100,000)
 - Housing Assistance (\$31,000)