



**MAINE YOUTH
JUSTICE**

Al Cleveland
al@maineyouthjustice.org
(207) 504-5109

**LR 3255 - Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice System Assessment & Reinvestment
Task Force**

Representative Warren, Senator Deschambault and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Al Cleveland. I'm the Campaign Manager of Maine Youth Justice.

Maine Youth Justice is a nonpartisan campaign fighting to end youth incarceration in Maine and invest in a range of community-based alternatives that respond to young people's needs, support families, and build community in support of alternatives to youth incarceration. Our campaign is led by young people who are most impacted by the justice system and centers the voices of those who have spent time incarcerated.

Maine Youth Justice is testifying neither for nor against this bill. We recognize the intent and spirit the members of the Juvenile Justice Task Force had and ask this committee to reconsider this legislation.

The Juvenile Justice Task Force held four public forums across the state where young people gathered to share their stories of incarceration and involvement with the justice system. Last Tuesday, over 60 young people came to the State House and to the Task Force meeting to make their message clear - Long Creek is causing extreme harm to young people and their communities and must be closed. For too long, Long Creek has been used as a tool to control and harm young people. It has taken away our youth's liberties, their freedom, and their communities. All you have to do is look at the deaths and ongoing violence inside Long Creek and long after young people leave those walls to see how this system is failing us.

As Clinton Lacey spoke to the Juvenile Justice Task Force in November, "We need a new vision for youth justice, one with love as its organizing principle that defines healing, restoration and renewal as its core objectives." We are asking for this committee to listen to young people and create legislation with a plan for the closure of Long Creek by 2022, a plan for the reinvestment of the \$18 million dollars currently being spent to incarcerate young people, and a plan to reassess responsibility for youth justice to a new agency by 2021. Creating an advisory panel of justice involved youth is fine. However, that doesn't excuse this body from listening to what youth have been calling for years - closure of Long Creek and reinvestment into community.



MYJ opposes giving the Department of Corrections additional control over our communities. The DOC is not the appropriate agency to administer community investment funds or to oversee the creation of new community-based programs for youth and families. Corrections has failed to deliver justice for young people or show they have the ability to administer funds in a way that promotes healing and transformation. The Center for Children's Law and Policy recommendations also confirmed the DOC shouldn't be the agency responsible for youth justice.

We recommend the creation of a grantmaking intermediary to support community investment. The Colorado WAGEES program is a great example of a justice reinvestment program that directs money from the Department of Corrections to the Latino Coalition for Community Leadership who is responsible for selecting community partners, distributing funds, and tracking performance metrics. The full report on WAGEES is attached. The results of this program were incredible; community partners who were not working together were able to build sustainable relationships that increased their ability to serve youth.

Section 2 of this legislation takes a step towards ending youth incarceration by attempting to create benchmarks of decreasing the amount of youth that we lock into cages. However, it fails to capture or codify the accountability that the Department of Corrections must take to reach these benchmarks. Maine's youth have been calling for a plan for closure of the facility by 2022 that includes a plan for reinvestment of the funds currently going to operate that the prison. The benchmarks provide no accountability to the DOC nor a mandate to create a plan for closure.

Maine Youth Justice strongly opposes Section 5 of this bill. Under no circumstances should there be reports on new detention facilities until there is a plan for closure of Long Creek. We must invest in communities across the state that have seen mass disinvestment from housing to community revitalization projects. Young people are calling for job training, counseling, and genuine relationships with caring adults. Not additional cages.

Maine Youth Justice encourages this committee to listen to the communities most impacted by the harms of youth incarceration. They have the answers and it begins with a plan to close Long Creek and investment into a continuum of care.