



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
111 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA MAINE
04333-0111

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

RANDALL A. LIBERTY
COMMISSIONER

To: Charlotte Warren, House Chair Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
Susan Deschambault, Senate Chair Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice Public and Safety

From: Randall A. Liberty, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Corrections

Cc: MaryAnn Turowski, Senior Policy Advisor Governor Mills

Date: January 21, 2022

Good Morning Senator Deschambault and Representative Warren and other distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety committee, I am Randall A. Liberty, Commissioner of the Department of Corrections.

It's a pleasure to be here today, providing you a briefing on the Division of Juvenile Services. Here with me on the zoom is Anna Black, our Director of Government Affairs. Also, we have a new face to our team, Christine Thibeault. Christine joined us at the end of 2021 as our Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services and we're so pleased to have her on board.

Many of you have interacted with Christine in various committee rooms over the last twenty years, or in the halls of the State House and through many impactful juvenile task force meetings. Christine's 26-year career as an attorney for juvenile matters with the Cumberland County District Attorney's Office has been stellar.

She has served on numerous juvenile justice related taskforces, including:

- For nearly 20 years on the Maine Juvenile Justice Advisory Group.
- The Coalition of Juvenile Justice, which is a national coalition of state advisory groups.
- She served on Maine Juvenile Justice Task Force, the Juvenile Justice Implementation Committee, the Juvenile Justice Detention Alternative Committee, the State Council for the Interstate Compact for Juveniles, and alongside many of you on the Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force.

A champion for youth involved with the justice system, Christine prioritizes equity and rehabilitation. She is sharp, compassionate, and motivated to usher in more reforms within the division of juvenile services.

It was a pleasure to have many of you visit Long Creek over the last few months. It's important for our staff to see stakeholders such as yourself onsite, engaging with staff, seeking to understand the operations.

In addition to legislators, we've provided tours to members of the Goodwill Hinkley board, members of the New Mainers Alliance, and other cultural groups. We enjoy these opportunities to engage.

Let's talk about how things are at Long Creek.

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Making our communities safer by reducing harm through supportive intervention, empowering change, and restoring lives.

As of Thursday January 20, 2022, there were

- 20 juveniles committed at LC—19 males, 1 female
9 of these youth assess currently as high risk, the others moderate.
- 7 detained—5 males, 2 females
6 of these youth assess as moderate risk, 1 as high risk.
- 8 on community reintegration—7 males, 1 female
- 64 on probation—55 males, 9 females
- 155 on informal adjustment (we cannot break out m/f)

Committed youth are adjudicated with offenses including manslaughter, gross sexual assault, aggravated assault, assault, burglary, reckless conduct with a weapon.

Detained youth charges include assault, criminal threatening with weapon, robbery.

I'm pleased to share that in terms of population reduction at Long Creek there was a 50% reduction in overall juveniles at the facility between January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021.

The facility has an active Board of Visitors, meeting regularly, both inside the facility and virtually. The Board is chaired by Dan Belyea, Chief Workforce Development Officer for the Maine Community College System.

Other members includes Shelby Briggs a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor in private practice with 20 years' experience working in Maine with justice involved, Dr. Anthony Ng who serves as medical director of community services with Northern Light Acadia Hospital, and Kifah Abdulla, the well-loved Portland based poet, artist, teacher, performer.

This group of overseers began their work together in June of 2021 and have met 7 times throughout 2021. These meetings included tours, meetings with staff, with residents, and DOC administrators. Their insight, ideas, and collaboration with Acting Superintendent Amanda Woolford has been vital. The chair of the BOV was part of the hiring committee for the new Superintendent, Lynne Allen who will come on at the end of this month.

We deeply value their unpaid services to the State's youth and their families.

Since the incidents in August and September, Long Creek has reinstated the visitor program. Reinvigorating the volunteer program is an important part of combating the issue of boredom. This was a contributing factor the CCLP identified in their December report of the late summer incidents.

Historically, visitors provide youth with engagement in numerous prosocial programs including career path discussion, sports, art, religion, faith, and culture.

One program of note that volunteers help support is the restorative justice program. The volunteer program is supported by a recently added full time restorative justice coordinator embedded inside the facility.

The facility has invested in the principals and practices of restorative justice, allowing these principals to permeate language and day to day operations, to the extent possible. It's not unusual to see restorative circles any given day to manage issues that arise among residents, and even between residents and staff.

In addition, we've launched new initiatives to engage the youth at more points throughout the day outside of their therapeutic and academic needs.



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There is a Young Gentleman's Group run by the MDOC's Credible Messenger and Disproportionate Minority Contact Coordinator, Anwar Whiting.

In collaboration with other DOC staff, including Roy King the MDOC's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Manager, Anwar engages high risk youth to tackle issues like respect, ego, self-awareness, prejudice, racism, bullying. Meeting regularly throughout a month, the boys discuss, role play, share, express feelings, talk through situations, and engage in mentorship with Anwar, Roy and others.

There are also more outlets for youth to move their body, like sports, dancing, yoga. There are more opportunities for engaging with literacy through computer and library programs. There are more moments of fun, of laughter, over pizza dinners and movie nights.

When appropriate youth can get off grounds with a staff to practice life skills, go to restaurants, walk around the mall, work, and visit with their families.

There are positive and silly moments typical of teenagers across the country.

In October the school inside Long Creek, the A.R. Gould school brought in principal Catie Curry. Catie has done a tremendous job elevating the educational services for students. Prior to coming on as Principal, Catie worked at Long Creek, as the coordinator for students transiting into and out of commitment and detainment between DOC and DOE. This depth of knowledge has ensured that the educational services youth receive are individualized and thorough.

A number of programs that run through the education department play a vital role in retuning hemostasis to the facility, while engaging youth with new interesting and important opportunities.

Under Catie's guidance, some new initiatives include:

- A partnership with The Portland Public Library, whereby a small group of educators run a weekly poetry program for Long Creek youth. This engaging workshop introduces Long Creek residents to poetry and allows for social development and interaction with the community.
- The students are doing large scale art projects aimed at making the Long Creek building more inviting and warmer.
- A student council has been created for residents in each unit. Teachers serve as the faculty mentor, working with the student council member on issues most important to the students. Currently, a discussion is underway about nutrition and culinary arts.
- Partnership with Thomas College's Center for Innovation, whereby a group of 3-4 Thomas students design a project as part of the College's Innovation Challenge to address a problem facing youth in Long Creek.

Another theme that came up in the CCLP reports that we've improved was related to staff numbers and staff training.

Vacancies are endemic across the corrections field, throughout business across the county for that matter.

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To combat that, the department has increased our effort on recruitment and retention, hiring a recruitment and retention coordinator who has hyper focused with facility staff on increasing applications.

At Long Creek specifically, there have been 15 new hires since September, and a handful of promotions.

There is a full time Director of Behavioral Health, two new contracted behavioral health clinicians, a full-time substance use disorder treatment provider, and a psych-social worker all onsite who residents have regular access to.

In addition to Christine and Principal Catie Curry, another notable recent hire is the new Superintendent of Long Creek, Lynne Allen. Lynne brings with her 14 years' experience working with justice involved youth through the Mass Division of Youth Services. She'll be on board at the end of this month. We're lucky to have her. She'll join a team of hard working, compassionate youth serving professionals.

What's nice too, is that she'll be side-by-side with staff attending the numerous trainings and re-trainings we're providing.

These trainings include:

- Mental Health First Aid
- De-escalation techniques
- Trainings on policies surrounding Use of Force
- Report writing
- Policy update refreshers
- Understanding of trauma
- LGBTQ+ training
- Staff are getting certified or recertified in verbal and physical de-escalation training through the Crisis Consulting Group (CCG) that's referred to by CCLP.

What we've seen since September, when we revamped the trainings is higher engagement and job satisfaction among staff. We hear that staff have more confidence in their jobs, understand better their expectations and facility policies, and fidelity to models. Since September there have been zero uses of OC spray, zero calls to activate the Special Operations team.

Under the leadership of Acting Superintendent Amanda Woolford, Regional Correctional Administrator John Coyne, Director of Security Aaron Beaulieu, Acting Director of Operations Scott DeWitt, and the Facility Operations Supervisors we've seen staff at Long Creek shine and thrive, supporting improved retention numbers.

Another important change we've done to support the development of future staff is to create a special training curriculum at the Maine Criminal Justice Academy designed exclusively for juvenile staff.

This curriculum is a first for Maine, designed by those working in the field for those who will be working in the field. This 6-week academy will provide staff nearly 60 modules, each multiple hours long, on topics ranging from adolescent brain development, adolescent emotional process and development, juvenile trauma, suicide prevention, and development disabilities. Of course, this academy for new hires also covers crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques, both taught by the Crisis Consulting Group the organization supported by Mark Soler, and of defensive tactics rather than offensive tactics.

In March we will be presenting this curriculum to the Board of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy. As soon as they approve it, we can begin training the first class.



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When I look back on the CCLP report after the late summer incidents at Long Creek, I feel we've made significant strides to reverse the concerns about staff behavior contributing to problems within the facility.

Another important part of our retention strategy is to ensure that Long Creek staff can focus on the role and responsibility they were hired for. For an example, when a teacher must spend class time trying to deescalate with one student, the learning stops for all. Or when an officer on a unit must stop a movie night because of a disturbance among one or two, that impacts the whole unit.

In response to this, our Juvenile Community Corrections Officers have been coming into the facility daily to help. These JCCOs pull small groups of youth together for activity time outside, or for a special project, or for community chores. Allowing facility staff to have that 2:1 or 1:1 level of engagement with youth, ensures unencumber learning or treatment can take place and issues no longer impact bystanders.

The last thing I'll talk about before opening for discussion are the reports due to this committee as part of Representative Brennan's LD 546, and later made into statute through the Governor's Budget in Part quadruple K (KKKK).

As you know Section quadruple K-5 asks the department to report to this committee on possible site locations for 2 to 4 small, secure, therapeutic residences for youths for the purposes of providing confinement and detention.

That report was delivered to you at the end of December. As you read, my team spent a few months working with the State's Bureau of General Services to identify and assess 18 properties. We can all agree that some of the properties are not appropriate due to lack of structural integrity, size, or location.

There were however a handful of properties we believed to be good options. To further assess these properties, we are forming a group of stakeholders to help us. We're referring to this as the Juvenile Community Resident Technical Assistance workgroup. They will be facilitated by Long Creek Board of Visitor member Shelby Briggs. Who will lead the group through a checklist of things to consider and investigate about the top options. Ultimately, the group will bring forth a recommendation. We anticipate this group doing the bulk of their work in the coming months. At which time I will share with you.

Finally, next month, just after Saint Valentine's Day, we will provide you a new annual report, as outlined in Section quadruple K-4.

As you're aware that report asks for a status report on the success and challenges, we're facing related to expanding access to community-based services, delivering programs, collaboration with Department of Health and Human Services, and so on.

The report asks about success and challenges, and specifics related to the reallocation of funds from the Long Creek budget.

To assist us in this we are putting together a technical assistance group, facilitated by Long Creek Board of Visitors Chair, Dan Belyea. The fiscal redeployment technical assistance workgroup will review contracts, review performance metrics and contractual needs to support community-based providers. Their work will take

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place over the next few months. Ultimately, they will bring forth a recommendation that we will share with you.

My team is at work on preparing this document for you. They have been in touch with Dr. Todd Landry and his team at OCFS. We look forward to reappearing at your convenience later this winter to discuss.

The flux within the Division of Juvenile Services in August and September are behind us. As a department, and as a division, we are as committed as ever to the juvenile justice reforms we started in earnest with so many of you two years ago. Good things are happening. Momentum continues forward.

Thank you for your time.

I am happy to answer any question you have.

Commissioner Randall Liberty