



April 14, 2023

Senator Teresa Pierce, Chair
Representative Traci Gere, Chair
Committee on Housing
Cross Building, Room 216
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: *LD 1422: An Act to End Homelessness and Assist Students Who Are Homeless by Establishing a Housing Voucher Program and Providing Site-based Housing Services.*

Dear Senator Pierce, Rep. Gere, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing:

My name is Mary Bonauto and I am the Senior Director of Civil Rights at GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders, a litigation and policy organization addressing issues affecting the LGBTQ people across communities in Maine, regionally, and nationally. GLAD, together with organizations well-known to you - the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine and Disability Rights Maine - thank you for the opportunity to support LD 1422 and Representative Brennan for bringing forth this bill.

We appreciate both the enormity of the housing crisis and this Committee's steps to innovate solutions. LD 1422 is such an innovative bill and would provide essential support for young people to attain a measure of housing stability and all of the goods that flow from that. Some of the young people who would benefit from this program are justice-involved. A different committee is in the process of considering an issue addressed in the 130th Legislature¹: whether to place “juveniles” in secure juvenile detention (currently Long Creek) for “care”—without regard to whether they pose a risk to themselves, to others, or to public safety—*because no suitable parent or other person can supervise them at home.* (LD 148, sec. 1).²

In other words, the idea is to place young people in a secure correctional facility because they are in fact or effectively homeless. Some of these youth are or have been in the care and custody of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, which assumes that role for the purpose of providing care that DHHS thought was otherwise lacking. Some of these young people are rejected from their families, particularly transgender and gender nonbinary youth. In addition, the child and family may well have been struggling with a constellation of issues ranging from

¹ P.L. 2021, c. 398, Pt. KKK, §1.

² LD 148 would also authorize detention to prevent a young person “from committing juvenile crimes or criminal offenses if released, whether conditionally or unconditionally.” (sec. 4)

parental stresses with mental health, substance use, or separation, to community factors like economic hardship and racism, to individual mistreatment or abuse of a child.

Whatever the reason for a young person's homeless, it is no way to grow up. LD 1422 is well timed because the power of housing vouchers to keep young people in community has already been demonstrated through the "Regional Care Team" ("RCT") model. The RCT model began as an intervention during Covid to remove young people from and prevent them from entering Long Creek and remains a live resource today.³

According to the RCT Dashboard, to date the "Regional Care Team" model has made 203 referrals and has repeatedly succeeded in finding solutions to meet a young person's needs and/or their family's in order to keep them safely in the community.⁴ Housing and family supports were the two issues that topped the list of supports needed. According to the Place Matters project, the pioneers of this model, housing was the most common *need*, and rental assistance and short-term hotel costs (funded with unspent covid money) were the most common *supports* in the first full year of the intervention in 2021.⁵ The RCT collaborations identified needs going forward, too, such as "using existing housing vouchers [for] justice-involved youth," as well as developing more transitional living and supportive housing programs, and supporting youth under 18 to be able to live independently."⁶ Significantly, eighty-three percent of the young people referred in July 2020 to July 2021 that year have remained in the community while the remainder have been confined or returned to Long Creek for further criminal conduct."⁷

³ This is an ongoing collaboration of the Place Matters team at USM with the Maine Center for Juvenile Policy and Law with essential participation from: the Departments of Corrections, Health & Human Services's Office of Child & Family Services, Education and Labor; community organizers addressing housing and homelessness; DRM (disability advocacy); wraparound services (from Wings and The Opportunity Alliance); and Regional Corrections Administrators and Juvenile Community Corrections Officers from each of the three DOC regions.

⁴ Regional Care Team Data Dashboard, available at:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjojNzJiNWlWZmZlY2EyMC00ZTM2LTg2NWVtYjZlNDQ2MGM2ODc5IiwidCI6IjM2Nzk0NjU4LWYyMTktNGFkNC1hZjdiLTFiNjhkMTkwMDQ0MyIsImMiOjN9&pageName=ReportSectiona774d7bde0d7eed03d15>.

See also Mara Sanchez, Erica King, Jill Ward & Jillian Foley, *Regional Care Teams First Year Review: Cross Systems Collaboration to Improve Positive Youth Outcomes* (hereinafter Place Matters RCT Report), available at https://placemattersmaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/RCT_Report_WEB1.pdf; Erica King, Jill Ward, Jillian Foley & Emma Schwartz, *Second Year Review: Cross Systems Collaboration to Improve Positive Youth Outcomes* (hereinafter Place Matters (2023)), available at: https://placemattersmaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/RCT_2022_final_WEB.pdf (hereafter "Second Year RCT Report").

⁵ Other needs included: connections with case management, counseling and medical care, technology including laptops, hotspots and cell phones, facilitation of a new foster care placement, funds for clothing, driver's education, art supplies and for security equipment to keep youth safe in the community.

⁶ Place Matters. RCT First Year Report at 9.

⁷ Id. (Young people presented with multiple needs: 40% Housing, 40% Family or Relationships; 38% Safety or Supervision; 36% Educational Needs; 33% Mental Health Support or Treatment; 33%

We strongly urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1422. It is an important intervention for young people's safety, stability and education. There are vehicles in Maine, including the RCT structure, that could use these resources to keep young people connected. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mary Bonauto, Sr. Director Civil Rights GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders

Atlee Reilly, Legal Director Disability Rights Maine

Carol Garvan, Legal Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Maine

GLAD

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Prosocial Needs; 31% Transportation; 23% Employment or Job Skills; 17% Substance Use Disorder or Treatment; 15% Legal Assistance; 10% Medical or Health Related Needs).

Maine Regional Care Teams Referrals

YEAR

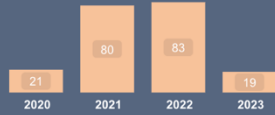
REGION

All

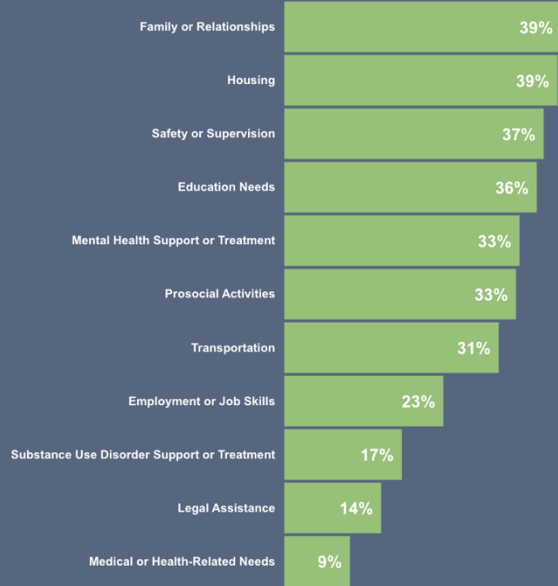
All

203
Referrals Made

Referrals By Year

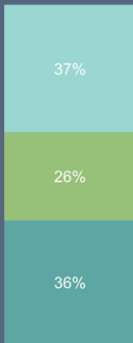


Supports Needed



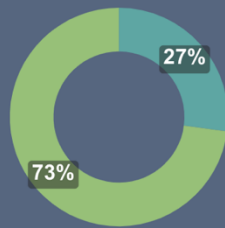
REGION

1 2 3



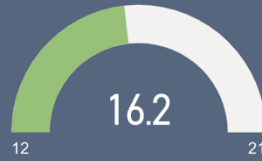
Type of Referral

Care Team Review Funds Request



144
Youth Referred

Average Age

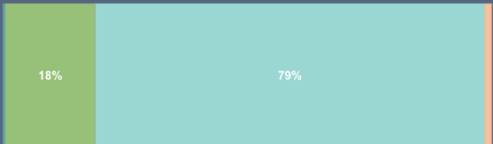


DOC Status at Referral

Committed Community supervision Detained (pre-adjudication) Other



A gender not listed: Female Male Missing/Unkn... Not sure Transgender/...



Race/Ethnicity	Number of Referrals
White	79.9%
Black or African American	8.5%
Latinx or Hispanic origin	4.5%
Two or More	3.0%
Not Sure	2.0%
Middle-eastern or Arab	1.0%

System Involvement History

