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Senator Pinny Beebe-Center, Chair
Representative Suzanne Salisbury, Chair
Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety
100 State House Station, Room 436
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: LD 1779: An Act to Develop a Continuum of Care for Youth Involved in the Justice System and to Develop Alternatives for Juveniles Incarcerated in Long Creek Youth Development Center

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public:

MACDL submits this testimony in support of LD 1779. Thank you to Representative Lookner for sponsoring this desperately important legislation.

Over the past several years, it has become clear that the carceral model of locking up children is not working. It is enormously expensive—both from a fiscal perspective and a human perspective. Maine must commit itself fully to investing in young people and ensuring them better futures away from prison.

Maine has always had more than enough money to fund the Department of Corrections. Because of that moral choice for investment, resources for community-based programming and care have always gotten short shrift. The time has come to divert funds currently slated to fund the imprisonment of young people into services that will actually help them develop and thrive.

Two years ago, both chambers of the Legislature passed a bill that would have closed Long Creek and reinvested millions of dollars of funds by June 30, 2023. That bill was vetoed by the Governor. As that initial proposed date looms near, I can't help but feel sadness for the progress that could have and should have been made since then.

This bill calls upon experts within our state to come together and formulate a plan for community-based alternatives to incarceration. It sets a date for reporting to this Committee its findings and recommendations by mid-February 2024. As a person who has sat on more than her fair share of committees, task forces, and commissions, allow me to urge this Committee to keep DOC's feet to the fire. Fast-track this bill. Fast-track its implementation. Invest in our youth. End youth incarceration in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration, for your attention to this matter, and for allowing me to share with you all today on this important issue.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tina Heather Nadeau, Esq.
MACDL Executive Director