

Maine Youth Justice

Date: 04/26/2023

Senator Pinny H. Beebe-Center, Chair
Representative Suzanne Salisbury, Chair
Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety
State House , Room 436
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: L.D. 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 Safety:

My name is Emma Paskewicz and I am an organizer with Maine Youth Justice. I reside in Sanford. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1779.

My step-father, who grew up in Fall River, Massachusetts (He'd walk out his front door and see people get shot) was in the system, and he was passed back and forth through every mental health institution in New England his whole childhood, as well as Long Creek and other Youth "Development Centers". I've seen first-hand the damage and trauma it has caused him that he struggles to heal from, and he doesn't trust any authority figure because of it. He would get drugged and he'd wake up in a completely new place without anyone telling him he was being transferred. This made him act out even more, and made him completely distrustful of anyone in authority, as well as caused a plethora of other mental health issues, on top of what he already had. The system failed him, it did not help him whatsoever, all it did was make things worse for him. He'd also hear and see authorities lie first-hand, and it's always their word against yours. Too frequently, the police officers lie, and it just

escalates the situation so that the officer can gain even more power over you.

The only thing that Long Creek does is create more harm that ripples throughout Maine's communities, and force more youths into traumatic, harmful environments. 90% of youths in the system have 3 or more mental health diagnoses, further demonstrating that Long Creek is a breeding ground for exacerbating mental health issues. In June of 2022, the Department of Justice sent a letter to the State of Maine notifying the state that they are in violation of the Americans with Disability Act by segregating children with mental health and developmental disabilities, by incarcerating them in psychiatric hospitals, residential facilities, and Long Creek.

This bill would help our struggling youth tremendously. Most kids are crying out for help because they're struggling and don't know how to help themselves. When you send our struggling youth to Long Creek, you're instilling the mind-set that they are a criminal, which can lead them down the wrong path if they feel trapped or stuck. All Long Creek "develops" is more problems and harm for young people. These kids just need help and community support, and when they are ripped away from their trusted communities, they are triggered into a fight or flight response, and in Long Creek, you can't run or hide anywhere so why are we surprised they are triggered to fight.

We need community-based care for Maine's youth. That includes, but is not limited to, secure, affordable, rent controlled housing, mental health resources that our youth can actually receive and afford, substance abuse counseling, community programs for our youth (such as basketball courts, parks, recording/art studios, community technology centers, etc.), and more programs for our youths that are staffed by people they can trust..

In summary, LD 1779 would vastly help our youth get the adequate and appropriate help and support they desperately need

and deserve. For these reasons, I request this Committee vote ought to pass on LD 1779.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Emma Paskewicz