

Dear senators, members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Paul Carignan and I work for the Maine Department of Corrections as a Special Educator at Long Creek Youth Development Center. I am speaking in support of LD 2121. I have worked at the facility for almost 6 years. I started as a Juvenile Program Worker in 2018.

During the time I have been at the facility there have been multiple changes due to the state's effort to create alternatives to the facility, and decrease the numbers of incarcerated youth. During the pandemic we saw the numbers decrease to below 25 at one point. Unfortunately, the offending youth did not get the memo that the facility was looking to decrease it's numbers, and find alternatives to the cold cement facility of LCYDC. In fact, when our staffing numbers came to a crisis level, Juvenile Community Correction Officers helped staff the building to maintain safety. In doing this they were able to witness 1st hand the challenges that existed in programming and overall staff and client safety within the facility. I overheard it being said that many of these JCCO's were trying to avoid sending kids to LCYDC as they understood 1st hand the impact of low staffing levels.

With a staff member working shifts that require them to be forced to work overtime multiple times a week. This has a direct impact on the facility. When I was coming on line as a JPW one of the most important learning was done working with a veteran staff member and modeling the way that they managed a unit and built and sustained relationships with residents. Times have changed. What was seen as valuable learning moments,, can now be seen as increasing the danger of working in the units. The people that you rely on to model as Unit staff are overworked and under extreme pressure as the intensity and complexity of individuals being housed at LCYDC has made the task far more complicated and requiring more staff presence. The results show staff turnover being unusually high and people have told me that it not worth the money to work in an environment where they are constantly at risk. There are careers requiring far less training and comparable pay outside of working for the state working in the private sector. Employment at LCYDC has become a revolving door, and many skilled, quality employees are leaving for employment where they can be respected through salary and appreciated for the skills they bring to an occupation. This is clearly not only impacts the safety, but the money that is used to train individuals for six weeks before they are ready to work in the unit is often wasted as people come to the realization that the supports and the compensation for their efforts are not in place resulting in six weeks of training wasted as the employees are not retained.

The end result of staff not being safe in the facility results in residents being unsafe, not receiving the necessary programming for proper rehabilitation and skill building. This leads to recidivism, and the Department of Corrections, specifically Long Creek Youth Development center not performing its mission.

"To promote public safety by ensuring that juvenile offenders are provided with education, treatment and other services that teach skills and competencies; strengthen pro-social behaviors and require accountability to victims and communities."

This is not the case at this moment due in part by the state not offering the necessary compensation to maintain a consistent qualified staff providing safety in communities within the state of Maine. By closing the pay gap we will begin to resolve many of the issues specific to the Maine Department of Corrections as well as the State's dedicated service employees integral to keeping this state performing at an optimal level.

Thank you for your time,

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