

**Testimony in opposition of LD 535
to the Judiciary Committee**

February 24, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford.

I am writing in opposition of LD 535, An Act to Authorize Judicial Disposition of a Juvenile Adjudicated of Murder or a Class A Crime to a Term of Commitment Extending Beyond the Juvenile's 21st Birthday.

As a state and a nation we have numerous laws to protect youth. There are drinking age, child labor laws and thankfully laws protecting youth from exploitations. We have these laws because we recognize brain development continues well into the twenties. There are also extensive developmental challenges associated with traumatic events that happen to children. Abuse, growing up with family members dealing with substance use disorders, having an incarcerated parent, or other traumatic situations will impact the brain development and overall health of a child and level of maturity well into their twenties.

The fact that this bill is considering policies to further incarcerate youth is offensive. Much more offensive is supporting incarcerating youth in adult prisons. We can all find extensive data on how incarceration in an adult system tortures a young person.

This NIH / National Library of Medicine article, “**Confining Children in Adult Prisons May Kill Them**” (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10833501/>) combined data from numerous sources and concludes “Children in adult carceral facilities are at heightened risk of suicide, rape, and other forms of violence, and are known to be placed in solitary confinement for ‘protection.’. This is what LD 535 will do to our children.

I would ask the committee what it says about us as a community, if incarcerating young people in any prison, and most dangerously to their future in an adult prison, is the solution we choose to support the children of Maine?

I hope you will oppose this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson

Sanford, Maine.