

**Testimony in support of LD 740**  
**the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety**  
March 24, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Committee:

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

I am writing in support of LD 740, An Act to Establish a Comprehensive Program to Divert Youth from the Criminal Justice System and Address Their Needs.

Supporting youth and families before they are impacted and potentially devastated by the legal / court system will save these families unnecessary trauma and make our communities safer.

This bill is supportive of a national movement for youth diversion programs. As noted by a March [2024 report by the Sentencing Project](#): “This momentum to make diversion a centerpiece of juvenile justice reform is encouraging given powerful research showing that youth who are diverted from the justice system are far less likely to be arrested for subsequent offenses and far more likely to succeed in education and employment than comparable youth who are arrested and prosecuted in juvenile court.”

The report also states “Greater use of diversion is also essential to reduce the persistent racial and ethnic disparities that pervade youth justice systems.” Racial inequities are an issue in Maine’s carceral system, including at Longcreek, as noted in the 2020 final report of [The Center for Children’s Law and Policy \(CCLP\)](#), the organization tasked with conducting a statewide assessment of Maine’s juvenile justice system. The report notes that between June 1, 2018 and May 31, 2019 “254 detention cases included information about youth race/ethnicity, with 73% identified as White and 23% identified as Black/African American. According to census data, across the state of Maine, Black or African American residents make up only 1.6% of the population.”

LD 740 supports many of the recommendations of this report, including Adopting specific criteria for youth who will be eligible for diversion, Ensure that all youth, regardless of geography, have the opportunity for diversion, Ensure equitable access to diversion, Do not place diverted youth on under juvenile justice supervision, and Offer intensive intervention services for youth with serious needs when necessary.

I urge you to support Maine communities, families and at-risk youth by supporting this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson

Sanford, Maine.

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/protect-and-redirect-americas-growing-movement-to-divert-youth-out-of-the-justice-system/>

<https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/de726780/files/uploaded/Maine%20Juvenile%20Justice%20System%20Assessment%20FINAL%20REPORT%202-25-20.pdf>