

## POSITION STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

### **LD 740: An Act to Establish a Comprehensive Program to Divert Youth from the Criminal Justice System and Address Their Needs**

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of *An Act to Establish a Comprehensive Program to Divert Youth from the Criminal Justice System and Address Their Needs*. There is also a significant correlation between involvement in child protective services, behavioral health challenges, and youth involved in the criminal justice system. This has been highlighted and outlined in the recent Settlement Agreement entered into by the State of Maine and the US Department of Justice.

According to a US Attorney General's Task Force on Children exposed to violence, 90% of juveniles involved in the criminal justice system have experienced at least one significantly traumatizing event, with 30% meeting the criteria for post-traumatic stress.<sup>1</sup> In a comparison study completed in Florida, only 2.4% percent of juveniles in the criminal justice system report no significant traumatic experience versus CDC findings that 34% of juveniles experience no adverse experiences in the general population.<sup>2</sup> The stark contrast between the pathways of young people involved in formal systems and the general public is drastic. In 2019, it was found that 65% of the youth at Long Creek were involved in at least one Child Protective investigation.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the Children's Law and Policy found in 2018-2019 that nearly 70% of the youth committed or sentenced to Long Creek received behavioral health services through Maine Care in the year before the placement, while Long Creek staff reported that 84.6% of the young people at Long Creek arrived with three or more diagnoses.<sup>4</sup>

According to emerging national models, 23 states have established similar programs to meet the behavioral health and social service needs of young people interacting with the criminal justice system, resulting in the best outcomes for both the young person and the community as a whole. These models are demonstrated by assessing and supporting the unmet needs of these young people. The recidivism rate of reinvolvement in the criminal justice system has decreased drastically, along with numerous cost-saving measures.<sup>5</sup> Because of this, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 740 to support young people across the state.

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**ABOUT NAMI MAINE:** Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.

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<sup>1</sup> [Adverse Childhood Experiences and Crime — LEB \(fbi.gov\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Journal of Juvenile Justice.pdf \(prisonpolicy.org\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM ASSESSMENT 2020, supra n.34, at 47.

<sup>4</sup> [United States' Investigation of Maine's Behavioral Health System for Children under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act \(justice.gov\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Protect-and-Redirect-Americas-Growing-Movement-to-Divert-Youth-Out-of-the-Justice-System.pdf](#)

## LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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