

Testimony in Support of LD 1923 to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

January 12, 2026

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

My name is Sarah Johnson, and I am a Sanford resident writing in support of LD1923: An Act to Repurpose Long Creek Youth Development Center and Build a Community System of Support

I was in full support of the original bill and feel it is unfortunate that the new amendment has transformed it from a plan to a study. It was an outstanding plan to support the youth of Maine by providing residential treatment and support services that do not exist for them on any level. The proposed amendment removes all purposeful plans for support and replaces it with yet another study group. Is there not enough available evidence and research that the current system of youth incarceration is a failure, and what alternatives are successful?

This report from the [Sentencing Project](#) “*identifies six alternatives to youth incarceration program models that consistently produce better public safety outcomes than incarceration, with far less disruption to young people’s healthy adolescent development at a fraction of the cost.*”¹

It builds upon this report “[Why Youth Incarceration Fails](#)” and concludes “*Incarceration also damages young people’s future success in education and employment. Further, it exposes young people, many of whom are already traumatized, to abuse, and it contradicts the clear lessons of adolescent development research. These harms of incarceration are inflicted disproportionately on Black youth and other youth of color.*”²

Key points in these reports, and vast amounts of others are:

- **Incarceration does not reduce delinquent behavior**
- **Incarceration impedes young people’s success in education and employment**
- **Incarceration does lasting damage to young people’s health and wellbeing**
- **Juvenile facilities are rife with maltreatment and abuse**
- **Racial and ethnic disparities in incarceration are vast and unjust**

and it lists “**Alternatives to Confinement Achieve Equal or Better Outcomes at Far Lower Cost**”, which was the definition and intention of the original bill.

¹ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/effective-alternatives-to-youth-incarceration/>

² <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/effective-alternatives-to-youth-incarceration/>

There is also overwhelming data in this journal report: [Adverse Childhood Experiences Among Justice-Involved Youth: Data-Driven Recommendations for Action Using the Sequential Intercept Model.](#) “Justice-involved youth experience high rates of [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#), placing them in great need of behavioral health treatment and risk for continued justice involvement. Policy makers, government agencies, and professionals working with justice-involved youth have called for trauma-informed juvenile justice reform.”³

“Research has found a direct link between childhood trauma and incarceration. The link can begin during adolescence through juvenile justice-involvement. Youth with ACEs are at increased risk for juvenile justice system involvement and re-offense”⁴

The time for studying the negative impacts of youth incarceration should be over. It took me under an hour to compile the research here demonstrating that incarcerating young people causes lasting harm, while community-based alternatives are not only safer for youth but also more effective at promoting public safety and health, and reducing long-term economic costs. The most challenging part was the vast tonnage of research I had to leave out. Maine youth deserve better from us. Investing in rehabilitative alternatives benefits youth, their families and our community and economy now and for the future. What is needed is not more research, but the political will to act on what we already know.

I hope you support LD 1923 to keep the clear vision for helping our youth in sight, and for the future introduction and passing of the original LD 1923.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson, Sanford

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/effective-alternatives-to-youth-incarceration/>

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/why-youth-incarceration-fails-an-updated-review-of-the-evidence/>

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8281579/>

https://dev.cjcenter.org/_files/cvi/Link%20Between%20Adverse%20Childhood%20Experiences%20and%20Incarceration.pdf_1691076144.pdf

³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8281579/>

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https://dev.cjcenter.org/_files/cvi/Link%20Between%20Adverse%20Childhood%20Experiences%20and%20Incarceration.pdf_1691076144.pdf