



January 12th, 2026

TO: The Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

RE: Testimony Neither For Nor Against LD 1923: An Act to Repurpose Long Creek Youth Development Center and Build a Community System of Support.

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and esteemed members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Jillian Foley, I am a Policy Associate and Project Director at the Catherine Cutler Institute. I am submitting this testimony **Neither For Nor Against** LD 1923 to provide a summary of relevant research to the Committee to aid your consideration of this bill.

LD 1923 seeks to repurpose the Long Creek Youth Development Center facility and invest in a community-based continuum of care for systems impacted youth. In summary, the main purpose of this bill is to transition the facility into a secure residential treatment facility to provide services to youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system, requiring that these services be provided by community-based organizations in partnership with the Department of Corrections. There have been many bills in recent years with various concepts to repurpose Long Creek and invest in community-based services for justice impacted youth and decades of research and assessments done that are relevant, both locally and nationally.¹ The research clearly shows that community-based alternatives to confinement not only [lead to better outcomes for youth](#), but also have the potential to cost less and are more effective at reducing recidivism, and therefore improving public safety for entire communities.² Time and again the data has shown that [confinement harms youth](#), increasing trauma for already traumatized children, and increasing future system involvement.^{3,4} In addition, community alternatives address racial disparities and keep youth connected to their families, peers, and support systems.³

¹ The Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment & Reinvestment Task Force website has a long list of relevant resources: <https://www.mainejjtaskforce.org/resources>

² Mendel, R. (2023). Effective Alternatives to Youth Incarceration. The Sentencing Project.

³ Mendel, R. (2022). Why Youth Incarceration Fails: An Updated Review of the Evidence. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/effective-alternatives-to-youth-incarceration/>

⁴ Barnert, E. S., Abrams, L. S., Tesema, L., Dudovitz, R., Nelson, B. B., Coker, T., Bath, E., Biely, C., Li, N., & Chung, P. J. (2018). Child incarceration and long-term adult health outcomes: a longitudinal study. *International journal of prisoner health*, 14(1), 26–33. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPH-09-2016-0052>



The Place Matters project has also published multiple reports in recent years specific to Maine which shows that a well-resourced community-based continuum of care leads to better outcomes for criminal legal systems impacted youth across multiple dimensions.

- Beginning with our [first report](#)⁵ in 2019, which summarizes the decades of systems assessments^{6,7,8} in Maine of both the corrections and health and human services systems that have come to the conclusion that community-based services are under-resourced, and it is precisely this gap in services that leads many youth to justice system involvement. This report also provided a framework for a continuum of care in Maine and laid out guiding principles, backed by research and best practices for improving youth wellbeing.
- A [2020 Place Matters report](#) examined the data and social determinants of health and came to the conclusion that there are clear social, economic, and community drivers that consistently impact youth outcomes and are known risk factors contributing to likelihood of juvenile justice system involvement. This conclusion again points to a need for systemic changes, and large scale community investments as the solution to reducing juvenile criminal behavior.⁹
- A [2021 report](#)¹⁰ examined the lived experiences of juvenile justice system involved youth, and mapped the impact of systems and places in their lives. Highlighting the stories of 35 Maine youth (ages 14-24) this research showed the interconnectedness of their experiences with family separation, housing instability, educational pushout, child-welfare involvement, behavioral health needs, parental incarceration, and their eventual criminal legal systems involvement. For many of these youth, these challenges began at a young age. This report speaks to the recommendation in this bill to focus on treatment and supportive services for these youth.
- A [2022 report](#)¹¹ examined the population of Maine's young adults (18-24) with histories of involvement with the Maine Department of Corrections and found that at the time, an estimated 1 in 10 young people aged 18 to 24 in Maine had some level of contact with the Maine DOC, with the majority having been as youth under the age of 18. This report also found that there was a disproportionate level of contact for Black and Indigenous young adults, who

⁵ Sanchez, M., King, E., & Ward, J. (2019). [Aligning Investments in a Community-Based Continuum of Care for Maine Youth Transitioning to Adulthood](#).

⁶ The 2009 the Juvenile Justice Task Force Report laid the foundation for systems change in Maine which was followed by the more recent 2020 [Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment](#).

⁷ Center for Children's Law and Policy and Maine Juvenile Justice Advisory Group. (2017). [Long Creek Youth Development Center Conditions Assessment Narrative Report](#).

⁸ Public Consulting Group. (2018). Maine Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child and Family Services: Children's Behavioral Health Services Assessment final report.

⁹ Sanchez, M., King, E., & Dumont, R. (2020). [From Pipelines to Informing Place-Based Strategies for Maine's Older Youth](#).

¹⁰ Layton, D., King, E., Foley, J., McMullan, S., & Sanchez, M. (2021). [Mapping the Impact of Systems & Places on Youth Pathways](#).

¹¹ Foley, J., & King, E. (2022). [EMERGING ADULTS: An Analysis of Young Adults with Justice System Histories in Maine](#).



were more likely to have contact with the DOC, and more likely to have been incarcerated. This finding supports other previous research in Maine showing a disproportionate level of involvement among BIPOC youth.

- A [2024 report](#)¹² examining the impact of the Maine Regional Care Teams (RCT) initiative highlighted the success of a collaborative community-based approach and made the recommendation to increase access to key continuum of care supports and services statewide. Specific recommendations included expanding peer support and mentorship programs, especially for youth with substance use disorders and increasing access to supportive, transitional housing. The report also recommended expanding culturally relevant and trauma informed services and programs that focus on healing and improving youth wellbeing.
- Two 2025 reports examined assets and needs in [Rockland](#)¹³ and the [Sagadahoc County area](#)¹⁴ communities and both highlighted the desire of youth to participate in decision making and visioning in their communities. These two reports highlight the need to involve youth with lived experience to envision solutions for individual and community challenges.

The research supports the need to invest in more community-based programs and services from prevention to reintegration. Our research has highlighted vast gaps in community services in Maine, which points to the need for large scale investments to address these gaps in areas such as behavioral health services, substance use treatment, and housing. In addition, our research has shown a need for expanded peer support and mentorship services and restorative programs to keep youth connected to school. As you consider and workshop LD 1923 I hope that you will examine the research, and decades of assessments to make an informed decision about the future of thousands of Maine youth and families.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions and be a resource for any future work sessions if needed.

Sincerely,

Jillian Foley, MPPM

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University of Southern Maine, Catherine Cutler Institute

¹² Schwartz, E., Foley, J., Ward, J., Cabral, A., & Atkinson, T. (2024). [Collaborating to Improve Youth Wellbeing in Maine](#).

¹³ [Listening Suppers at the Landing Place: Talking with Rockland-Area Youth About School, Work, & Life](#).

¹⁴ [Building Youth Hope: Assessing Community Assets and Opportunities for Supporting Youth Well-Being in the Sagadahoc County Area](#).