

# Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



January 12, 2026

Senator Beebe Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Jan Collins, I am Assistant Director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC) an organization committed to ethical, positive, and humane changes in Maine's prison system. I am speaking neither for nor against LD 1923 An Act to Repurpose Long Creek Youth Development Center and Build a Community System of Support.

MPAC is aware of the judicial systems separate code for youth and of the reasons why youth require special consideration. Data supports alternatives to the standard use of carceral punishment.

*Stanford and others have demonstrated that in response to traumas and adverse experiences similar to separation from parents, children secrete high levels of the stress hormone cortisol. This elevated cortisol has negative effects on brain structure and connectivity, slowing neuronal growth and reducing volumes of critical brain structures like the hippocampus and affecting brain regions involved in effective emotion regulation. Not surprisingly, research has also demonstrated adverse effects of early trauma on children's psychological functioning, including higher rates of depression, anxiety and "externalizing," or acting-out, behaviors.*

Although this affect is greatest for young children the effects persist in teens. The simple act of separating children from their parents can produce the very behavior we are hoping to curb. But if that separation also results in incarceration, we can expect additional harmful effects.

The state of Maine is currently under a consent decree with the US Department of Justice for several reasons, but in particular because it is incarcerating children instead of providing mental health services in the community. Even while we meet today more children with mental health diagnoses are ending up at Long Creek.

Whether one is an adult, a child, or a prison corrections officer, prison is a stressful environment. As you have heard today, report after report has outlined the need to provide services for children in the community as an alternative to incarceration. The only question I have is why after spending tens if, not hundreds, of thousands of dollars on outside evaluations have we not closed Long Creek?

We support the original intent of the bill and would rather not have yet another study. We suggest acting in the best interest of children, today.

I am enclosing additional information on why states around the country are closing their youth prisons. Please see attached.

Thank-you,

Jan

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Gotlib. The psychological impact of early life stress and parental separation. Stanford Report. 2018. <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2018/06/psychological-impact-early-life-stress-parental-separation>

## Key Drivers for Closures

- **Falling Populations:** Overall youth incarceration rates have dropped, making large facilities economically unviable, notes [The Imprint](#) and this NCBI article.
- **Cost & Inefficiency:** High operating costs and poor outcomes (failure to reduce recidivism) pushed policymakers to seek better solutions, according to The Imprint and this NCBI article.
- **Abuse & Conditions:** Reports of abuse and poor conditions in facilities, like in [Los Angeles County](#), spurred action, says the AJPH article and [this YouTube video](#).
- **Advocacy:** Organizations like [Youth First](#) and directly impacted youth leaders push for decarceration, notes [No Kids in Prison](#) and this AJPH article.