

Cassie Nedwell

Cape Elizabeth, Maine

January 12, 2026

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and Honorable Members of the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee, thank you for this opportunity to address the Committee today. My name is Cassie Nedwell, I live in Cape Elizabeth, and I am here to support LD 1923: An Act to Repurpose Long Creek Youth Development Center and Build a Community System of Support. I grew up in and around South Portland, and throughout my youth, I saw many friends and family members pass through Long Creek Youth Development Center. Consistently, they described their experiences as traumatizing. They shared stories about abusive staff, a lack of essential services, harsh conditions, and how much worse they felt after their time there. Reports from 2017 and news articles detailing incidents of “brutal beatings” show that little has changed.

Now, as a social worker, I recognize an even deeper level of systemic failure. Psychological studies demonstrate that detention facilities have negative long-term effects on youths’ development, physical and mental well-being, and education.<sup>1</sup> These centers are designed for punishment, but locking kids in a facility that constantly reminds them of their mistakes is incredibly detrimental to their health and progress. I work now in Mobile Crisis Intervention and have responded to several calls regarding youth. In my experience, when I respond to youth in crisis their entire demeanor changes when they have someone actively listening to them and treating them with respect. These youth are free to leave at any moment during our assessments but they choose to stay and work through their crises and come up with a plan for the future. This is what every child deserves.

The goal of LD 1923 is to repurpose Long Creek into a rehabilitative residential facility that helps our youth by providing comprehensive, individualized services. Our kids are not broken or ruined, they do not need to be beaten or talked down to. They need support, guidance,

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<sup>1</sup>

Mayer, A. (2021, November 11). *They're Only Kids: The Dangers of Detention and Alternatives*

*to Incarcerating Youth | CLB | Criminal Law Brief.* Studentbriefs.law.gwu.edu.

<https://studentbriefs.law.gwu.edu/clb/2021/11/11/theyre-only-kids-the-dangers-of-detention-and-alternatives-to-incarcerating-youth/>

and to be shown that they are worthy of success and happiness. This bill offers a path toward real healing and positive change for Maine's young people.

This is why I am urging you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1923. Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you, I am happy to answer any questions you may have regarding my testimony or experiences.

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