



To:

Senator Anne Beebe-Center, Senate Chair of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
Representative Tavis Hasenfus, House Chair of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
Distinguished Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

Date: January 20th, 2026

RE: 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 distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Kage Johnson, and I am a resident of Winslow, Maine. I am testifying in favor of LD 1923 on behalf of Healing First!, a Maine-based transformative justice collective led by survivors of serious harm, including sexual assault, intimate/domestic partner violence, and gun violence. We also serve as the Maine state chapter of the global coalition, Survivors For Justice Reform. Healing First! is in full and earnest support of LD 1923.

I am also testifying as an individual; I am a restorative and transformative justice practitioner and steering committee member of the Maine Restorative Justice Coalition (MERJ). As a past Youth Justice Liaison, I facilitated restorative justice processes involving violent and non-violent offenses with youth at the Restorative Justice Institute of Maine (RJIM) from 2022-2025.

Healing First! supports restorative approaches and healing-based alternatives to incarceration in the wake of harm. This includes the repurposing of Long Creek Youth Development Center. As heard directly by several youth who testified at the public hearing on January 12th, 2026— Long Creek, as it exists, does not provide an environment that fosters much “development” at all. On the contrary, it cultivates *detriment*.

I have worked with a number of youth who have entered the criminal legal system. When given the option of restorative justice, I witnessed firsthand how they were able to learn from their mistakes, grow, and repair the harm that they had caused. In my time as a facilitator, *I came into contact with youth who had been incarcerated in Long Creek prior to*

ever even being offered a single diversion program, such as restorative justice. One such youth was an 11 year old child, who had no charges, had an immense amount of trauma, and had merely run away from home. These youth, offered no other alternatives prior to incarceration at Long Creek, were egregiously failed by the state.

Maine's Juvenile Code emphasizes providing care, guidance, treatment, and services rather than just punishment. The use of incarceration, especially for children and teenagers, is damaging and creates long lasting effects, including trauma and wildly increased rates of recidivism. Not only does incarceration cause further harm to those who are incarcerated; it also causes harm to their loved ones and communities. Incarceration tears families apart. This trauma contributes to cycles and generations of harm. In the wake of Long Creek— We need to invest in and expand rehabilitative, restorative community-based options. *We have a duty to rehabilitate— youth, especially.*

Healing First! would much rather see our state's precious financial resources going to programs that would genuinely foster and increase opportunities to experience support, growth, justice, accountability, healing, and success, such as through restorative justice programs and community supports like mental health services, substance use treatment, mentorship, peer support, job training, financial access to extracurricular activities, etc.

Children do not belong in prisons.

I passionately restate Healing First!'s position of being in full support of LD 1923. We urge you to invest in healthy, whole communities where our youth are given the support and resources needed to succeed— and not to continue investing in the revolving door of harmful carcerality— by voting in favor of LD 1923. On behalf of Healing First!, we thank you for your time and consideration.

With gratitude,

Kage Johnson

Co-Founder, Senior Advisor, & Programs Director
Healing First!

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