

Skye Gosselin
Biddeford, ME
May 2, 2023

Re: L.D. 1779, An Act to Develop a Continuum of Care for Youth Involved in the Justice System and to Develop Alternatives for Juveniles Incarcerated in Long Creek Youth Development Center

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Skye Gosselin and I'm the Organizing Director with Maine Youth Justice. I am a resident of Biddeford, ME. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Maine Youth Justice is a nonpartisan campaign fighting to end youth incarceration in Maine and invest in a range of community based supports that respond to young people's needs, support families, and build community. We are a campaign led by young people who have been incarcerated in Long Creek and directly impacted by the juvenile justice system.

I'm here to testify in support of LD 1779. The bill will outline the steps the state needs to take to transfer young people out of the custody of the DOC and create a plan for needs assessments.. Young people need to be met with care options by trained professionals.

I was 12 years old the first time I was introduced to the system. I was a little girl who got bullied and I finally stuck up for myself. I got called down to the principal's office where the principal and school resource officer told me I couldn't walk home. I had no choice and I ended up getting arrested and taken to the police station. That day my peers were chasing the cop car and I had my first mug shot. My childhood got ripped away from that moment on. I was sent to Long Creek at 14 and was in and out for such minimal things such as skipping school, cutting class, being past curfew. I was lonely on the outside and lonely on the inside. I never should have been incarcerated so young.

Long Creek says it's a development center but the only thing it is developing is post traumatic stress disorder. Being arrested at school, ripped from my community to get sent to Long Creek left trauma around education. To this day, I'm healing my relationship with education.

What I needed instead of Long Creek was someone who believed my side of the story before jumping to conclusions. I was navigating a community without resources or programming to support me and my family's needs. Many people do not understand that when young people are incarcerated we begin to see ourselves as society treats us -- as outcasts, driving us further into a life of rebelling. The trauma does not stop once you leave detention. Your family, friends, classes

have all moved on. The state provides little resources to support reentry. Young people leave incarcerated settings so traumatized that they've lost an understanding of human interaction, including how you handle conflict or connect with people. There is no going back to how it was before incarceration and we as young people are stuck dealing with the pain that was forced upon us in a failed attempt at justice.

The bill will direct this committee to initiate the process of establishing an entity made up of community members and experts who have visions for the tax dollars tied to youth incarceration. Maine Youth Justice has been demanding the divestment of funds from the MDOC and the investment in resources that young people and communities need to thrive.

I encourage this committee to listen to the communities most impacted by the harms of youth incarceration. This is why they should be the centered stakeholders in decision making. We have the answers and it begins with a plan to end the criminalization of youth and investment into care, support, and resources for young people and their families that is led by the community; not the Department of Corrections.

Skye Gosselin
Maine Youth Justice