

POSITION STATEMENT NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

LD 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

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine stands neither for nor against *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*. Maine is in serious need of rebuilding a robust community-based intensive treatment system for youth who have experienced trauma and abuse, who struggle with complex mental health needs and who act out their distress through criminal behavior. We need small regionally based intensive assessment and treatment programs following best practice evidence-based models of trauma informed treatment and overseen by Maine's mental health system and DHHS. Twenty years ago these "Bridge Homes" existed across Maine and were a part of the range of treatment and support options supporting Maine's youth in need. And the need for a smaller correctional facility as a needed option for the most troubled and dangerously out of control behavior will remain.

NAMI Maine supports the diversion of significant funding from the locus of the Department of Corrections and into the sphere of community mental health treatment and support under the Department of Human Services and devoted to rebuilding the lives of youth who have faced significant trauma and deprivation. And we need a placement option for a very small proportion of out-of-control youth to maintain them in a secure setting to halt their destructive behavior and begin a process of treatment. As has been seen in a number of Maine communities over the past year, the lack of a secure, short-term holding facility for severely troubled youth has resulted in these youth placing themselves, our communities and law enforcement at greater risk.

As this committee continues to look at the critical issues facing our young people involved in the criminal justice system, it is important to utilize the various reports outlining the issues that the youth in the state of Maine are facing and recommendations on how to improve the system. This includes the Maine Youth Justice Group, which was the result of previous members of the committee, the Department of Justice Letter regarding findings against the state, as well as taking testimony that has been presented over this session regarding the pressing issues facing communities for youth who are not in custody.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.