



Maine Sheriffs' Association

"One Team, One Mission"

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May 2, 2023

L.D. 1779 – An Act to Develop a Continuum of Care for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System and to Develop Alternatives for Juveniles Incarcerated at Long Creek

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice, my name is Ken Mason. I am the Kennebec County Sheriff and I'm here today on behalf of the Maine Sheriffs Association.

Maine Sheriffs discussed L.D. 1779 – An Act to Develop a Continuum of Care for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System and to Develop Alternatives for Juveniles Incarcerated at Long Creek. The unanimous position of the Maine sheriffs is **OPPOSED**.

The topic of juvenile incarceration in this committee is one that we feel is often completely misunderstood. Maine sheriffs are parents, we're grandparents, we are family members who deeply feel empathy towards young adults. We understand that young minds are not fully developed until the individual reaches his or her early twenties and we agree that appropriate facilities and programs are essential for those who make devastating choices. We are all on the same page with everyone in this committee room.

With well over five hundred and fifty years of collective law enforcement experience, Maine Sheriffs feel highly qualified to speak to the circumstances surrounding egregious choices made by the youth you're trying to serve in L.D. 1779. There are children/young adults that commit murder. There are young adults who commit arson. There are young adults who irreparably destroy the lives of others. These individuals are not the norm, but the State has a responsibility not only to those youth who commit serious crimes, but to others they could potentially harm.

Long Creek Youth Development Center not only meets the needs of those youth who reside there, but their programs enhance the lives of those they serve. The facility is licensed to house up to 164 youth. Not all juvenile offenders require this level of security, and Long Creek has reduced its population to less than 20% of its capacity. This bill is yet another effort to close this vital facility. Just last session, we heard a member of this committee share that a resident of Long Creek met with him and told him that Long Creek "saved his life". This is the kind of success story you need to take into consideration when contemplating your vote on this bill.

Long Creek provides education, behavioral health, medical, worship services, and recreational services in a secure environment. As we began to research this bill, twenty male and two female youth were residing at Long Creek. These twenty-two youths have one-on-one attention from caring, invested professionals. To mandate that the state scrap this facility that endeavors to serve those youth who have the greatest need is unconscionable.

Eliminating a facility that ensures public safety is, in the opinion of Maine sheriffs, not in the best interest of Maine's citizens. We strongly urge this committee to keep the doors of Long Creek open by voting **Ought Not To Pass on LD 1779**.

Maine sheriffs graciously appreciate the time to share our observations and position with this committee. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Ken Mason
Maine Sheriffs Association