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GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
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AUGUSTA MAINE
04333-0111

RANDALL A. LIBERTY
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY OF

**RANDALL A. LIBERTY, COMMISSIONER
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**

In Opposition to

**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**

**Before the
Criminal Justice Public Safety Committee
May 2, 2023**

Senator Beebe-Center and Representative Salisbury and other distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, I am Randall Liberty, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Corrections providing testimony in opposition to LD 1779.

The Department remains firm there will always be a need for secure placement for violent youth who pose a risk to public safety. Taking away the option for secure placement will not stop dangerous, violent behavior from occurring.

Vermont, the only New England state to close their youth facility, reaches out often to us, asking us to take their violent youth who are currently being held in an adult facility, and those being held under guard in hotels.

The MDOC is deeply committed to supporting the youth in our care who have been detained and/or committed by a judge. The range of services available to youth, following a needs and risk assessment, are bountiful, and have only become more so as the number of youth remain low.

Long Creek today is not what it was three years ago, five years, ten years ago. Today there is healing, there is education, there is behavioral health treatment, there is laughter, and comradery. Many of you have been inside recently and seen it. Many of you have met the principal of the A.R. Gould School, Catherine Curry, who came on board in 2021 and has redesigned the school to ensure individual educational goals and needs are met. Many of you have met Stephanie Netto, Long Creek's chief of volunteer services, who makes sure the young people have regular contact with community members, religious leaders, employers, community groups, and prepares the youth for these contacts. The staff are dedicated and caring professionals who could tell you stories for hours about youth who are healed because of the services provided.

And still many others of you, mainly my law enforcement and legal peers know the names of the youth at Long Creek because of the violence they've committed. Like me, you've been to the crime scenes, you've conducted the investigations, you've unearthed the ugly, and you've heard the victim's tragedy.

This bill would close Long Creek, preventing the secure confinement of a juvenile under any circumstances, no matter how dangerous the juvenile is, no matter how violent or tragic the crime.



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This is dangerous prospect.

It's a false narrative to think the State can close a facility, redistribute funds, and suddenly no longer have violent young people.

That said, we are committed to continuing to improve the system, to be responsive to individual needs, to work collaboratively with community partners, and other state agencies, for the betterment of young people.

To that end this committee should know we are hard at work negotiating with Representative Brennan and Speaker Talbot Ross on two other juvenile system related bills. These should be ready for work by this committee in the coming weeks. The work happening in that regard build up collaboration and systems, while ensuring safety.

We ask this committee to vote ONTP on LD 1779.

Thank You,

Randall A. Liberty, Commissioner
Maine Department of Corrections