

Katie Whitehead
Lewiston, ME
May 1, 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 Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Katie Whitehead and I'm an organizer with Maine Youth Justice. I reside in Lewiston Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1779.

One of my close friends is incarcerated and he is being treated horribly and deeply harmed physically, emotionally, and sexually by guards and it kills me to know it happens and there isn't much that I can do to help right now. Seeing that jail is not a rehabilitative place makes me wonder what could be a resource that would actually help people if they didn't go to jail for what they did. The system affects more than just the person incarcerated. The harm that incarceration causes ripples through Maine's communities and even affects the friends and families of someone locked up.

Behind the locked doors of prisons, there's more harm happening than the public knows about and when people with experience being incarcerated tell us about what is happening, we should care more and actually listen to their expertise. I've personally seen my friends put in complaints about how they are being neglected and abused in county jail and it's being completely overlooked and disregarded. It's an abuse of power. Maine needs to stop investing in prisons. Now is the time to reinvest in supporting youth in their community before they get locked up and beaten further down.

What I would love to see in the community other than jails is better resources for poor people. I'd like to see better community activities, rehabilitation facilities, sober houses, and mental health places. Maine should prioritize hiring more doctors so we don't have to be on an extremely long waitlist and people can access treatment when they need it.

Young people who have experienced the system know what interventions and resources they need to keep them out of the system of incarceration and heal. I am urging the committee to consider the visions and possibilities my comrades at Maine Youth Justice are providing. The time is now to invest in a reinvestment committee led by previously incarcerated people to start the reinvestment of tax dollars tied to youth incarceration and Long Creek, into these community activities and support.

In summary, LD 1779 would benefit the youth and young adults in many meaningful ways. For these reasons, I request this Committee to vote ought to pass on LD 1779.

Thank you for your consideration,

Katie Whitehead