



Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Criminal Justice and Public Safety: my name is Adam Zuckerman and I am the lobbyist for the Maine People's Alliance. Our 32,000 members stretch from Kittery to Fort Kent.

The criminal justice system has a long history of inadequacies in the treatment and rehabilitation of substance use and mental health. We support a non-punitive, evidence-based, and public health approach that seeks to fund prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery services across the state.

We appreciate the \$4 million in funding for medication-assisted treatment and other health care in county jails. However, that pales in comparison to the \$9.7 million that this budget dedicates to 32 new law enforcement positions. It also pales in comparison to the \$14 million that we continue to spend to incarcerate roughly two dozen children at Long Creek. Earlier this month the New York Times and the Bangor Daily News published a lengthy expose. It detailed how our continued insistence on punishment above all else is hurting Maine children and communities. They recount the stories of parents of troubled teens in Aroostook County, who have to wait over a year for their children to see a therapist. They tell the stories of exasperated prosecutors and police officers who want to provide solutions, but do not have any options.

Tanya Pierson, a York County prosecutor who has testified before this committee, noted how some teens are unnecessarily detained at Long Creek. In one case, one teen with no family was incarcerated in Long Creek because they were not provided foster care. In another case, a youth needed more supervision but was not put into a residential treatment facility. Time after time, Ms. Pierson said, the Health Department's response to requests for help is: "We don't have anything for this youth."<sup>1</sup>

Our failure to adequately invest in alternatives exacerbates the problems that our criminal justice budget is meant to address.

In Tuesday's HHS budget hearing we heard how our mental health system is in crisis, with large parts under threat of collapse. If we used some of the \$107 million set aside from this budget to invest in mental health care and alternatives to incarceration, it would not just save us money—it would help us to be a safer, healthier, and more just state. I urge you to support that vision. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> "Shame on Us': How Maine struggles to handle troubled youth." *The Bangor Daily News and the New York Times*. February 1, 2024. <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2024/02/01/mainefocus/how-maine-struggles-to-handle-troubled-youth-nyt2024/>