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## TESTIMONY OF

### **JILL O'BRIEN, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS MAINE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**

**January 12, 2025**

#### **In Support of:**

#### **LD 1923, Sponsor's Amendment to Create a Resolve that would replace An Act to Repurpose Long Creek Youth Development Center and Build a Community System of Support**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Jill O'Brien, and I am the Director of Government Affairs for the Maine Department of Corrections.

When LD 1923 was proposed, the Department had many objections to it, because what it sought to do was not workable given the current juvenile code and the distinction between juvenile criminal commitment and commitment to the Department of Health and Human Services. Another issue was that the funding that would be put towards it would never have been enough to finance the major overhaul and new construction envisioned by the bill.

But, since the bill was carried over, the Sponsor and the Department have worked together diligently, along with Representative Hasenfus, and found common themes that we all agree will move the State forward. We agree that the State should examine the feasibility and cost of making changes to the existing facilities at Long Creek that will continue to improve and normalize the environment. The Department has already been doing this work in the background. For example, the Department recently added a state-of-the-art recording studio and print shop to the resources available to youth at Long Creek.

Thus, I am testifying today in support of the Sponsor's January 9, 2026 Amendment to the bill.

Of course, as with any specific plan, there are details that need to be fine-tuned. One is timing. The Amendment proposes that by February 1, 2027, the Department will submit a plan and a working group will have convened and studied 6 extensive areas, all by February 1, 2027. By the time this bill becomes law, there will be seven months left to accomplish this work. This is not enough time for what the Department and working group are setting out to do. Thus, the Department suggests a deadline of October 2027.

Second, the Department of Corrections should take the lead. Many of the youth at Long Creek receive services from DHHS in the community after leaving Long Creek or before coming to Long Creek, but while at Long Creek, the Department of Corrections is solely responsible for the individuals' education, services, mental health, and medical treatment. Thus, the Department of Corrections requests that it be given control over the makeup of the working group. While the Department would provide a list of members to the Chairs of CJPS, the requirement that the group be chosen "in consultation with" the chairs of CJPS is vague and likely to cause confusion and delay.

Finally, Section 2 of the Amendment is unnecessary. Since February 2024, 34-A MRS § 7009 has required MDOC to provide data on juveniles that is “updated monthly.” Section 2 of the bill simply proposes a new effective date and adds the term “each month,” when the data is already updated monthly. Thus, Section 2 should be deleted.

The Department of Corrections believes these issues can be resolved and should not stand in the way. Thus, the Department supports the January 9, 2026 Amendment and hopes the Committee votes that it ought to pass, once our suggested changes are incorporated.

I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

Jill O'Brien  
Director of Government Affairs  
Maine Department of Corrections