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I am an Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Southern Maine, and President of the Board of the Portland Center for Restorative Justice. I am providing written testimony in support of LD546, An Act to Implement the Recommendation of the Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force. As a social worker, I provided mental health services in jails and prisons; I spent much of my time in this role confronting and reckoning with the trauma that so many incarcerated people have experienced through their involvement in the criminal justice system. Scientific research has repeatedly shown the devastating social, emotional, and financial impacts of institutionalization, especially for young people. In order to reduce trauma exposure and promote positive outcomes for youth, we must reduce the population of detained and committed youths must remain a priority for our state; setting benchmarks, as outlined in LD546, can help achieve this goal. Furthermore, alternative programming, as outlined in LD546, will provide youth with a stronger foundation upon which to build safe, fulfilling, and law-abiding lives. Punishment—especially in the form of detainment—will never lead to better outcomes for our youth; only healing and support will. I have seen firsthand the miraculous transformative power of restorative justice interventions specifically, not only for young offenders, but also for their victims and community. Through LD546, Maine has the opportunity to be a leader not only in criminal justice reform, but also in realizing more equitable and humane responses to the youth in our communities. I urge you to support LD546 at this crucial juncture. Thank you.

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