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I would like to speak in support of closing the Long Creek Youth Development Center and ending youth incarceration in Maine. By closing Long Creek and investing the \$18 million operating costs into care, job training programs, and mental health support, we can invest in the future of our youth and our community.

My primary concern with this bill is that the Maine Department of Corrections is not the appropriate agency to administer community reinvestment funds or to oversee the creation of new community-based programs for youth and families. So I do not support the fact that LD 546 appropriates \$2 million additional funds to the Department of Corrections.

Instead, I support the idea of reassigning responsibility for youth justice to a new agency that will support young people in all of their needs and have the leadership of people who have experienced incarceration.

Along these lines, I support the calls from Maine Youth Justice to create a statewide program intended to support community-based programming with a grant-making intermediary who is not tied to the Department of Corrections or Department of Health and Human Services

I do support the provision of the bill that would repeal a section of the Maine Juvenile Code that allows detention for physical care for youth who have nowhere to go.

Finally, I encourage the committee to listen to the voices of youth, especially those who have been incarcerated. They have made clear that it is time to pass legislation that creates a plan for the closure of Long Creek, repurposing it for community, not incarceration.