



Testimony of Stephanie Eglinton  
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In support of LD 546, An Act to Implement the Recommendations  
of the Juvenile Justice System Advisory Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force  
March 26, 2021

Good afternoon, Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee.

The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine. I am here to offer testimony on behalf of the Maine Children's Alliance in support of LD 546, *An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice System Advisory Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force*.

The Juvenile Justice task force has done great work gathering detailed and specific advice from both national experts and local youth who have the lived experience of being incarcerated. [Their findings support](#) that most youth at Long Creek Youth Development Center are there not because they are a danger to others, but because there is no other place for them to go. More than half of the youth detained are there for three days or less, indicating their confinement was not due to long-term safety concerns. Incarcerating youth who pose no risk to public safety should not be acceptable simply because we lack the community-based investment and infrastructure to provide alternative, less harmful placements.

While Maine has made great strides in both reducing the number of youth arrests [Kids Count Youth Arrested](#), and in reducing the number of youth incarcerated [Kids Count- Youth in Detention](#), we should not be satisfied until there are sufficient alternatives to placing any youth in confinement.

[The Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment Report](#) is a deep dive into Maine's accomplishments and existing gaps in ensuring the best outcomes for youth in our state's juvenile justice system. The report authored by the Center for Children's Law and Policy notes that "new leadership in the state executive branch, a commitment to reform by legislative leaders and strong support from the Judiciary have created a favorable environment for change." This legislation is an important step toward implementing the important recommendations in this report.

LD 546 would:

- Set benchmarks for reducing the number of youth incarcerated,
- Continue the role of the Juvenile Justice task force in implementing the recommendations of the report, focused on the development of community-based system of therapeutic services and intervention for justice-involved youth that works to divert them from detention and commitment,
- Report on possible sites and locations for secure, therapeutic placements for detained and committed youth for whom community-based placement is not the best option,
- Appropriate \$2 million for community-based, therapeutic services and programs to divert more youth from detention and commitment.

The Maine Children's Alliance supports this legislation as an important step in establishing a robust community-based system of treatment and support for youth who have justice system involvement. With this system in place, Maine can then focus on the goal of eliminating placements of youth at Long Creek altogether. Incarceration of youth has been proven to be ineffective both as a deterrent and as a means of rehabilitation for young people. And in this way, incarceration of youth does not provide for more safety in our communities, nor does it provide meaningful support to the youth who experience incarceration. When our youth struggle, it is our responsibility to ensure they get the help they need to address challenges and emerge ready to contribute positively to our communities and state.

Thank you for your consideration.