

Anne Farrington
Auburn

RE: LD 546 - An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force

Sen. Deschambault, Rep. Warren, and other members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety:

As much as I admire the effort and good intentions of the Task Force's recommendations reflected in this bill, I am writing to oppose it.

In 2016, when my aging world view was upended by our country's presidential election, I joined a local group of people working for justice and as a result began paying attention to what must be done to make my neighborhood, my town and my state a better place for all of us to live, work and play, and raise families.

I learned about the work of Maine Youth Justice, and was reminded of the late '70s when my boyfriend's uncle was a counselor at the Maine Youth Center, now Long Creek Youth Development Center. The counselor was earnest and desirous of helping the kids he worked with, but the stories he told about the center were not encouraging, to say the least.

Here is it 2021, and the stories we hear about Long Creek still are not encouraging. The stories we hear about our collective failure to care for and protect the kids at Long Creek are disheartening and shameful.

Because I expect that Maine Youth Justice will speak to you during the March 26 hearing on this bill, I'm asking that you pay careful attention to what they say about their experiences, and their reasonable, well-thought-out ideas and solutions for ending youth incarceration. They're speaking for me, also.

I vehemently oppose giving the Maine Department of Corrections any money whatsoever for any involvement whatsoever with youth. Don't give the DOC millions of dollars to find other places to imprison youth. We must stop incarcerating kids at Long Creek, and remove youth entirely from the jurisdiction of the DOC. I'm in favor of spending the millions of dollars saved by closing Long Creek on community support, programs and solutions throughout Maine.

I truly believe if we all searched our hearts and consciences, we'd find that we all know Long Creek Youth Development Center should have been closed decades ago. The Maine State Reform School for Boys may have been solution in 1853; it is NOT a solution today. Please close Long Creek. Thank you.