



March 26 2021

**LD 546 - Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice System Assessment & Reinvestment
Task Force**

Representative Warren, Senator Deschambault and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Skye Gosselin and I'm a Community Organizer with Maine Youth Justice. I am 22 years old and a resident of Biddeford, ME. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Maine Youth Justice is a nonpartisan campaign fighting to end youth incarceration in Maine and invest in a range of community based supports that respond to young people's needs, support families, and build community. We are a campaign led by young people who have been incarcerated in Long Creek and directly impacted by the juvenile justice system. We are calling for the closure of Long Creek Youth Development Center, the end of youth incarceration, and the reinvestment of the \$18.6 million dollars currently being spent to lock up Maine's youth.

Maine Youth Justice is opposed to this bill as it is currently written. We thank Rep. Brennan for his commitment to close Long Creek and encourage this committee to take all actions to get there. As this bill stands, it does not call for closure of Long Creek or the decarceration of the 28 youth still inside the last youth prison. Any effort to end youth incarceration and build out the continuum of care in Maine needs to include the leadership and expertise of formerly incarcerated people.

Maine Youth Justice believes that no young person should be incarcerated or prosecuted in the criminal legal system. This summer, thousands of Mainers protested in solidarity with Black lives demanding the closure of Long Creek Youth Development Center. I was 14 the first time I went to Long Creek Youth Development Center. Before I was locked up, my friends were all sent to Long Creek. I was lonely on the outside and lonely on the inside. I never should have been incarcerated so young. My relationship with education was harmed when I was arrested at school. Being ripped from my school and community to get sent to Long Creek left trauma around education. Seven years later, I'm healing my relationship with education not because of Long Creek supporting my growth, but because of my commitment to make sure no young people have to go through the experiences that I did.

What I needed instead of Long Creek was someone to have helped me that first day, someone who believed my side of the story before jumping to conclusions. I was impacted by the juvenile



justice system before I was arrested. I was targeted by my school resource officer and I was navigating a community without resources or programming to support me and my families needs. Most kids just need to feel cared for, not just another case with numbers at the top. Many people do not understand the kind of trauma young people experience while incarcerated. When young people are incarcerated we begin to see ourselves as society treats us -- as outcasts, driving us further into a life of trouble making. The trauma does not stop once you leave detention. Your family and friends have all moved on. There is no catching up on your education and the state provides little resources to support the acclimation. Young people leave incarcerated settings so traumatized that they've lost an understanding of human interaction, including how you handle conflict or connect with people. There is no going back to how it was before incarceration and we as young people are stuck dealing with the pain that was forced upon us in a failed attempt at justice.

LD 546 appropriates \$2 million additional funds to the Department of Corrections MDOC is not the appropriate agency to administer community reinvestment funds or to oversee the creation of new community-based programs for youth and families. Young people and their families do not have confidence that MDOC will keep them safe. For too long, we have been under the control and fear of the Department of Corrections. Youth don't belong to be under correctional control. We need care and support; without the fear of incarceration and isolation.

Maine Youth Justice encourages this committee to listen to the communities most impacted by the harms of youth incarceration. We have the answers and it begins with a plan to end the criminalization of youth and investment into care, support, and resources for young people and their families that is led by the community; not the Department of Corrections.

Skye Gosselin
Maine Youth Justice