



March 19, 2021

Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee  
Re: LD 546, HP 391 Public Hearing Friday March 26, 2021

Thank you Senator Deschambault and Representative Warren, Chairs and members of The Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on LD546, An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force at this public hearing. I am Margaret Micolich, Senior Program Manager with The Restorative Justice Project Maine.

The Restorative Justice Project Maine strongly endorses passage of LD 546.

For the past 16 years the Restorative Justice Project Maine (RJPM) has actively engaged, funded largely by contracts with the Department of Corrections, in diverting youth and adults from Maine's criminal justice system to restorative practices that support individuals to stay in, or re-enter their communities with a more positive and healthy outcome than is possible with the stigma often associated with being adjudicated, detained or committed. As a RJ practitioner working within LCYDC, I witnessed the inappropriate use of LCYDC as a 'last resort' for youth. Maine juveniles deserve better. As a society, we must give priority to our youth and offer them safe place to stay in their own communities and to receive the treatment needed. A community-based approach presented here is an important step to restoring and transforming young lives. Working with the Maine Coastal Regional Reentry Center in Belfast, Long Creek Youth Development Center, area school districts RJPM has witnessed a positive step away from the negative consequences that a punitive justice approach often imparts. LD 546, reestablishing the task force of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group to implement the recommendations of the February 2020 Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force report, will be vital to advancing the criminal justice reforms that all of us know will result in better and more cost effect outcomes for Maine youth, families and communities.

We are particularly supportive of LD 546's intention to create community-based support that will provide therapeutic services, local safe space and other programs to Maine youth to better assure sustainable, long-term positive participation in their communities. In fact, RJPM is currently engaged in planning and implementing "Community Justice Centers" in Waldo, Knox, Lincoln and Sagadahoc Counties through a \$924,000 Bureau of Justice Assistance, Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation grant. This grant dovetails directly with the intentions of LD 546 to create permanent, positive outcomes that focus on belonging and connection.

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**Restorative Justice Project**

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We applaud LD 546 for supporting the 2020 Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment report recommendations to establish some universally accepted benchmarks and measurements of success in all programs engaged in improving our justice system. This is no easy task. It is essential, however, to assuring the long-term public support.

And, we support Section 8. Appropriations and allocations of LD 546 that will appropriate \$1,500,000 to the Department of Corrections to provide funding to nonprofit community-based providers for community-based, therapeutic services or programs for the purpose of diverting and reducing the rate justice-involved youth in detention or commitment. Our 16 years of work, as a community-based organization, has demonstrated the positive outcomes that result, when local communities get involved.

Thank you for allowing The Restorative Justice Project Maine to present testimony on LD 546 at the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee public hearing on March 26, 2021. We look forward to the passage of LD 546.

Respectfully submitted,

*Margaret Micolichek*

Margaret Micolichek, Senior Program Manager  
Restorative Justice Project Maine