

**Testimony for the 130th Session of the Maine State Legislature Joint Committee for
Criminal Justice and Public Safety**

Public Hearing: March 26, 2021

In favor of L.D. 546

**An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Juvenile Justice System
Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force.**

Chairpersons Senator Deschambault and Representative Warren and Members of the Committee, my name is Suzanne Rudalevige living in Cape Elizabeth. I am testifying on behalf of the Anti-racist Policy Committee of the HopeGateWay United Methodist Church, Portland.

Under this bill a juvenile who cannot be returned home can no longer be held in pre-adjudication detention. This is important, since, while expedient, this was never a positive choice and often involved children who were not from a European background.

After much advocacy and slow progress over many years, Maine policy for the juvenile justice system now has a tangible, strategic plan with benchmarks and reporting times to this Committee. This should result in real time progress in the three main areas of reducing institutional imprisonment, finding more and more relevant community services, and working collaboratively across systems and departments.

When I first came to Maine about 20+ years ago and was working with the Maine Council of Churches to promote restorative justice, I asked the then Commissioner of the Juvenile Division how different wings of the new Long Creek facility, not yet completed, could be repurposed should we be successful in decreasing the number of children held there. The response was that there was no plans or thoughts in that direction.

I am so glad that the focus now is of finding and developing small residences for children who would otherwise land at Long Creek and that specific services in the community are to be expanded for those who do not require residential care. Programs which are evidence based, gender responsive and tailored to the different cultures of the children served are all crucial. Well organized and funded collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services will provide a holistic approach to meeting positively the challenges of the whole context of a child's life. We have known all this for a long time. Let's do it!

Please recommend the passage of this emergency bill. Thank you.