

**OFFICE OF POLICY AND LEGAL ANALYSIS  
BILL ANALYSIS**

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**TO:** Members, Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

**FROM:** Jane Orbeton, Legislative Analyst

**DATE:** April 10, 2021

**LD:** 963 An Act To Create Culturally Sensitive Treatment and Recovery Halfway Houses for Immigrants Transitioning out of the Juvenile Justice System

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### **Summary**

This bill requires the Commissioner of Corrections to establish treatment and recovery halfway houses as follows:

- They will serve youth who are immigrants or whose families have immigrated to the state who are transitioning out of the juvenile justice system.
- They will provide housing and substance use disorder treatment, mental health treatment, education and job training and employment and job opportunity services.
- They will provide referrals to community-based services and supports and education and employment resources.
- They must be assigned to only one gender.
- They must be funded with contributions from the Department of Corrections and with any grants, donations and private funding received for this purpose.

The bill requires the Commissioner to work in partnership with a nonprofit organization formed for the purpose of involving immigrants in the civic work of their communities, local immigrant community members and associations and local, state and federal agencies to provide halfway house services and other services in a culturally sensitive manner.

### **Testimony**

#### **Proponents:**

1. Representative Heidi Brooks presented the bill and provided written testimony in support. Rep Brooks stressed the tremendous crisis in the community and the challenges of immigrant youth and families in getting the housing and services and supports that they need for youth

transitioning out of Long Creek Youth Development Center. Rep Brooks noted that strength and interest in the immigrant community in her district and the importance of responding to their needs.

2. Senator Libby spoke in support of the bill and of providing residential services and substance use disorder, mental health and job counseling and training and employment services.

3. Representative Kristen Cloutier spoke in favor of the bill and provided written testimony. Rep Cloutier spoke of the complex needs of justice involved youth and their families and the lack of culturally sensitive housing and services and the pleas of the immigrant communities for assistance.

4. The following persons spoke in favor of the bill and provided written testimony in support: Maza Mohammed, volunteer at LCYDC, Abdifatah Ahmed of the New Mainers Alliance who presented a petition from the community, Ahmed Abdirahman assistant iman of the Muslim Religious Center, Elmuatz Abderahim co-executive director of the New Mainers Alliance, Amina Mohamud interpreter and cultural broker from Lewiston, Alice Cornwell of North Haven and the New Mainers Project, Cate Blackford of the Maine People's Alliance, Suni Mahamond iman from Lewiston, Mariam Mohamed of Scarborough community worker and leader, Mutaz Abdelrahim co-executive director of New Mainers Alliance, Adbi Abdalla of Lewiston, Mahmoud Hassan of Portland, Salih Abdelsamad of Lewiston, Cindy Charest of Westbrook, Ali Al Mshakheel of Biddeford Iraqi Community Association of Maine, and Abdirizak Mahamoud of Lewiston community volunteer.

**Opponents:**

1. Colin O'Neill, Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services at DOC, spoke in opposition to the bill and submitted written testimony. Associate Commissioner O'Neill stated that DOC agrees wholeheartedly in the positive power of recovery-based housing but opposes a mandate to establish a residence just for immigrant females and one just for immigrant males. The DOC notes that upon release from Long Creek Youth Development Center many youth are ready to return home and that DOC supports youth going to the least restrictive housing option. Mr. O'Neill stressed the community residence for female youth operating in South Portland and the anticipated opening soon on one for males in Auburn and DOC's commitment that justice involved youth experience a fair, equitable and responsive juvenile justice system that provides them with positive outcomes.

**Neither for nor against:**

None

**INFORMATION REQUESTED:**

1. Information was requested from DOC on data that show where the need is highest and unmet needs.
2. Information was requested from DOC on how many DOC staff members provide culturally sensitive services and a description of those services.