

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, Representative Brooks, and honorable members of the committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today. I am here to speak in favor of LD 963, "An Act To Create Culturally Sensitive Treatment and Recovery Halfway Houses for Immigrants Transitioning out of the Juvenile Justice System." My name is Abdifatah Ahmed and I am a resident of Lewiston, Maine.

I am sharing my testimony as the one of the directors of New Mainers Alliance and a community organizer helping the community since 2003 when I moved to Maine from Massachusetts. For the past 17 years, I have worked with many immigrant youth and their families, and I have observed that many young people in my community have had negative experiences in the juvenile justice system.

I want read for you the testimony of a mother whose son was negatively affected by the juvenile justice detention system.

This story happened to a 16 yearold boy who used to enjoy playing soccer and family time. Here is the mother's account:

We live in Lewiston. I appreciate your time today to share our family's experience. My son, who was 16 years old at the time, made an extremely poor error in judgment. Our ordeal began with my son being taken to an adolescent psychiatric hospital within two 2 weeks of his arrest, due to shock and suicidal thoughts in the current facility. The charge nurse there said that my son was very confused and afraid. He remained in that facility for two weeks and was then ultimately transferred to the Juvenile Detention Center.

One of the most frustrating things for me was that the court, the judges, and the prosecutors did not know my son, but they were not willing to give him the second chance they might have given to their own kids if they were in the same situation.

As a parent, if we have a culturally sensitive treatment and recovery options for our young people, it would a lot easier for us. I believe that all kids deserve a second chance. I hope that the Criminal Justice and Public Safety will allow States to have the option to let youth who are convicted in courts and serve their sentence in juvenile facilities received Culturally Sensitive Treatment and Recovery Halfway Houses for Immigrants Transitioning out of the Juvenile Justice System.

Passing this bill will help my son and others who are similar situation. Thank you for allowing me to share my family's story with you today.

This is the end of the testimony that the mother asked me to share on her behalf. Thank you very much.