

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 Maza Mohamed and I am a resident of Portland, Maine.

I am sharing my experiences today as a volunteer for the Long Creek Youth Development Center.

I have been involved in helping youth in the Juvenile detention center for the past few Years, working with young immigrant girls and boys. These young people feel lonely, guilty and hopeless.

Their experiences in detention go against their culture, beliefs, and what they used to know. When they are released, they feel disconnected from their culture and sense of belongings. Most of them feel depressed and worried about their future plans and goals. I work with them as a mentor to help them their education and their future plans, and a culturally sensitive treatment and recovery halfway house will help significantly to accomplish their goals.

My experience working with youth in the juvenile justice system has led me to understand the experiences of these youth. Having a culturally sensitive halfway house will help to prevent youth from returning to juvenile detention, and will create opportunities for them to rebuild relationships with their families. It will create an opportunity for them to gain motivation and help them to reach their potential. It will be an opportunity for them to receive counseling and systematic support that can bring them back to society.

I strongly support this bill because the lack of culturally competent facilities has dire consequences: breaking of families. homelessness, drug dealing, trafficking. When youth are released from detention, due to lack of support they often come back to detention center. This halfway house will help them and offer culturally competent counseling, mentoring and resources to help them re-enter the society again.

Thank you so much,

Maza Mohamed