

Aleksandar Diamond-Stanic
Lewiston

Dear Senators Deschambault, Cyrway, and Lawrence, and Representatives Warren, Costain, Morales, Newman, Pickett, Pluecker, Reckitt, Rudnicki, and Sharpe.

My name is Aleks Diamond-Stanic, and I live in Lewiston in Senate District 21 and House District 59. I want to convey my strong support for LD 1668.

I am the parent of three children in Maine and I am an educator, and I often think about the support systems that are in place for our kids, both when they are thriving and when they are struggling. I think it is time to end youth incarceration in Maine and to support the wellbeing of our youth and our communities.

By closing Long Creek, repurposing the facility as a community center with supportive housing, and re-directing the \$18 million operating costs into community-based support for youth, we can invest in the future of our youth and our community.

I have not previously been incarcerated, but I have learned a lot over the past year from the work of Maine Youth Justice. I've learned how more than 20% of the youth currently detained at Long Creek are Black Mainers, even though Black people represent less than 2% of the state's residents. I've been able to hear and listen to the voices and stories of individuals who were previously incarcerated at Long Creek, and I encourage the committee to pay close attention to what they have to say. They have articulated both the deep flaws of the current system and a clear and compelling vision for a better future. They have the wisdom and experience to explain why youth act out -- it is because something has happened to them or because they are missing something in their lives. Putting kids in Long Creek doesn't solve those problems -- it just deepens the trauma.

We can do better. As described in the bill, we need supportive housing, jobs programs, educational programs, and health care, including mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

In addition, the bill specifies a very reasonable timescale for creating a plan to close Long Creek (by December 1, 2021) and for closing Long Creek itself (by June 30, 2023). And the plan to close Long Creek also includes a workforce development plan for Long Creek staff, developed in coordination with the Department of Labor.

This is a thoughtful bill for all relevant stakeholders, and it is especially important as we think about our kids. How can we provide the support they need to be thriving members of our community? This bill constitutes a very important step in answering that question.