

Jeremy Mack
Restorative Justice Institute of Maine

Dear Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, Chair members Rep. Deschambault and Rep. Warren,

My name is Jeremy Mack and I am the Young Adult Diversion Program Lead and policy and advocacy coordinator with the Restorative Justice Institute of Maine. I am writing testimony in support of Rep. Lookner's bill LD 1668.

Youth incarceration is not ethical, restorative, nor fiscally responsible. The state of Maine currently spends \$18.6 million on incarcerating 27 youth in South Portland. That's 171 staffers for 27 kids and 150 empty beds.

Nothing about incarcerating children as young as 11 years old is ethical. Data from the Justice Policy Institute, the Juvenile Law Center, the ACLU, and Maine's own Justice Policy Program and the Maine Center for Juvenile Policy and Law out of the University of Southern Maine and University of Maine Law respectively, all lay out the long-term negative impacts of incarceration on youth development, mental health and future life potentials.

Rates of physical and sexual abuse at Long Creek are high, as are rates of re-incarceration and trauma post-release.

As the Restorative Justice Institute of Maine, we believe in creating cultures of accountability in response to harm caused. We believe that nobody is disposable. We believe that community safety comes from us taking care and working with one another when harm occurs.

The Justice Policy Program's Place Matter's report series does a brilliant job outlining how we can as a state divest money out of carceral systems and into a continuum of care-oriented community-based organizations. Organizations such as Tree Street Youth in Lewiston and Boys and Girls Clubs across the state provide young people with resources that help prevent the root causes of harms caused. The Restorative Justice Institute of Maine, Restorative Justice Project, Portland Center of Restorative Justice and Downeast Restorative Justice provide community conferencing and mediation. Organizations like Sweetser provide mental health and crisis support, while spaces like the Preble Street Teen Center provide housing resources for homeless teens.

All together, organizations such as these provide youth with a continuum of care that leads to youth, family and community well-being. It is within our belief that the \$18.6 million currently keeping Long Creek funded could be much more equitably and sustainably used to fully-fund organizations within this continuum. Legislators in Virginia, Kansas and Connecticut have committed to closing some of the worst youth prisons in their states and redistributed funds to community-based solutions that actually support youth. It is of our opinion that it is time for Maine to follow-their leads and do the same.

In terms of the Restorative Justice Institute of Maine, we have worked with hundreds of youth diverted away from the criminal justice system to go through restorative conferencing for all levels of offenses. We work with youth, their families and those harmed to create a repair agreement that is agreed upon by all parties. We humanize the youth that cause harm, giving them the space they need to take accountability for their actions and help them connect with resources that will help them move forward, while working with harmed parties to make sure their needs are being centered throughout the process. Restorative conferencing requires much emotional labor, but relative to traditional judicial measures is low cost and high reward. Restorative Conferencing effectiveness rates at reducing recidivism are remarkable (youth that participate have less than a 10% recidivism rate versus a traditional <70% rate post-adjudication), while participant satisfaction rates from both parties that participate is very high.

In closing, I greatly urge members of this committee to vote in favor of passing LD 1668 for an

investment in a just transition for Maine's future.

Thank you for the time in reading this statement, and for all the time you put into public work.

With all my best,

Jeremy Mack

On behalf of the Restorative Justice Institute of Maine