

Margaret Micolichek  
Restorative Justice Project Maine

Thank you Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee for the opportunity to support LD 1668, which will close the Long Creek Development Center by 2023 and transfer funding for juveniles enmeshed in the criminal justice system to community service agencies that will train, educate, counsel and support them until they are ready to re-enter society. I am Margaret Micolichek, senior program manager of Restorative Justice Project Maine. I live in Belfast.

RJPM has been working with juvenile offenders for 15 years, often under contract with the Department of Corrections. Our staff brought restorative practices to Long Creek and has handled hundreds of juvenile cases for courts in the Midcoast. Our experience in providing alternative, non-punishment resolutions to cases involving real and traumatic harm to individuals and families has taught us several lessons.

The most important is that incarceration for juveniles is harmful, counter-productive and unresponsive to the physiological and mental health realities of young people. I can tell you story after story after story of young folks who took responsibility for their bad behavior in a restorative circle, spoke openly and meaningfully with the victim(s) of their crime and then followed through by completing the agreement reached by all involved in the circle. We have gathered reactions from participants since beginning our work, and more than 90 percent say they felt the outcome was satisfactory.

Rather than describing the grim reality of life at Long Creek, I'd prefer to think about how a child will be treated in the community-based, supportive, family-style environment of their new "homes." They will have a mentor to provide experience and guidance, teachers who will create a curriculum just for them, healthy food, opportunities for exercise and interactions with their peers. So different. So cost-effective.

Early in this session we were prepared to support LD 546, which has a longer-term goal of closing Long Creek but leaves with DOC the task of creating a different, healthier environment for youths. We are now supporting LD 1668 because it sets a firm date for closing Long Creek and leaves to those who are trained to work with youths the challenging job of developing a new and better way of intersecting with their lives in which they are part of a community, not kept behind bars, apart from their families, friends and neighbors.

Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

Margaret Micolichek  
Senior Project Manager  
Restorative Justice Project Maine  
Belfast