

Wesley Pelletier
Portland

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak in support of LD 1668, A resolution To Develop a Plan To Close the Long Creek Youth Development Center and Redirect Funding to Community Integration Services for Adjudicated Youth. My name is Wes Pelletier and I live in Portland, Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to discuss how we can make sure we're properly supporting Maine's youth.

Being locked up was never in the cards for me. I grew up in an emotionally and financially stable household, and was able to make mistakes and learn and grow from them without the threat of being separated from my community and the people who cared for me.

I think many of us here share that reality, and so when we see kids who ARE taken away and locked up, it's easy to assume that they must have done something beyond the pale to deserve it, when in reality they simply don't have a support network to back them up against an authority that has pre-judged them based on circumstances they have absolutely no control over.

We've spent trillions of dollars on the enormous hammer of our incarceration system, and that's come at the expense of other tools-- tools that would help turn weaknesses into strengths and mistakes into learning opportunities; tools that especially benefit vulnerable youth. What this has resulted in is that anything-- or anybody-- we determine to be an "issue" is pounded at to make them conform. If we cannot make them fit after so much pounding, we toss them aside and blame them for their moral shortcomings.

We need to have more tools, and we need to stop spending all of our money-- my money-- on a single blunt instrument. Long Creek is a hammer that we should not be spending \$18 million a year on it. It cannot be remade into a screwdriver.

Instead we need to be investing in tools that are appropriate to the incredibly important task of raising our youth as a community and as a state. Tools like job trainings, mental health services, and comprehensive and compassionate community-based welfare programs. I urge you to expand what we as a state are capable of when it comes to our kids by passing LD 1668. Thank you.