

**Testimony for the 130th Session of the Maine Legislature:
Joint Committee of Criminal Justice and Public Safety.**

In Favor of LD 1668: Resolve, To Develop A Plan To Close the Long Creek Youth Development Center and Redirect Funding to Community Integration Services for Adjudicated Youth

I have previously written in favor of LD 546: An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment and Reinvestment Task Force. I see this LD 1668 as accelerating the proposed progress described in LD 546 and taking it to its radical conclusion of closing the LCYDC entirely. I support that proposal and the resolution that the site should be used for a community center and housing. I would hate to see it used as a prison or detention site for another population.

Together with LD 546 - which I understand is currently tabled- there is room for discussion as to whether it is overall better to remove youth from the CJS or create more bureaucracy. Can the CJS shed its tendency toward a culture of punishment and confinement?

Though not called out by Amnesty International for abuse as was its predecessor facility, LCYDC (poorly conceived in the first place) nevertheless grew the institutional skin of a prison.

Howard Zehr , the father of restorative justice awareness in mainstream USA, stated that we need three things to be whole and healthy: we need to feel *some* autonomy/control so that our actions have meaning; we need a safe place both physically and mentally; and we need to feel connected to community. Prisons cannot satisfy these basic needs. Prisons are not safe places, they do not nurture the community to which the child needs to belong and they remove autonomy, dictating behavior and norms.

It maywell be that some children are not safe with their families and some are damaged sufficiently badly to be a community safety risk. But still a detention center is not the appropriate place. There are models for housing children safely that Maine can evaluate. For most children community resources, properly funded and suitably staffed, are an option which holds more hope for a constructive future and not a funnel to adult prison. We also must admit that we have done poorly in working with cultures not rooted in European models, with the result that children of color end up as the last in line for community based support services.

I very much urge you to seriously consider a new start for our young people by not having the forever- option of a juvenile prison. Thank you.

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