

EMILY TROLL
South Portland

To the honorable Senator Deschambault and Representative Warren, and all the members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Emily Troll, and as a resident of South Portland, I am testifying in support of LD 1668 to close the Long Creek Youth Development Center.

Every time I walk by Long Creek, I am ashamed to live in a town where children are imprisoned. I've taught school for a number of years, and I can tell you that the one thing kids need the most is a sense of belonging. I've seen some challenging behaviors, and I have some idea of the violence that young people are capable of. But I know that isolation from connections can only increase pain and mental health struggles. It's just not right.

These youth, and all youth, deserve to be free. They deserve to be treated with respect, and supported with resources for their mental and emotional growth and well-being. This thoughtful proposal considers all of this. With only 27 youth left in Long Creek, it is long past time to end this costly and harmful endeavor.

This bill has been drawn carefully and considers the many interconnected issues at stake, including support for Long Creek staff. Most importantly, this bill would set up a process to divest in incarceration and invest in the community.

My biggest hope for the implementation of this bill is that those who work in incarceration will have the chance to follow the lead of folks who have been impacted by the system. Those should be the voices to lead us. Maine Youth Justice, and similar organizations should be relied on heavily for guidance and imagination.

This could be so different. Please, let's start this change today.