

**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”**

*Testimony in support provided by Pedro A. Vazquez, Chair South  
Portland Human Rights Commission  
May 10, 2021*

Members of the Committee:

For 170 years, since our first youth correctional institution opened, America’s approach to youth incarceration has been built on the premise that a slightly modified version of the adult correctional model of incarceration, control, coercion, and punishment — with a little bit of programming sprinkled in — would rehabilitate young people. Sometimes the names attempt to camouflage the nature of the facility, but whether they are called “training schools” or “development centers,” nearly all of these facilities are youth prisons.

Whether the benefits and costs of operating Long Creek are weighed on a scale of public dollars, community safety, or young people’s futures, they are damaging the very people they are supposed to help and have been for generations. It is difficult to find an area of policy where the benefits and costs are more out of balance, where the evidence of failure is clearer, or where we know with more clarity what we should be doing differently.

It is long past time to choose a different path, one that aligns the moral, ethical, and human imperative with fiscal prudence, safer communities, and better youth outcomes. The momentum is beginning to shift. Leaders from the President to the Pope are calling for a halt to heavy reliance on incarceration. Early-adopter states and localities are trying alternative approaches. Youth incarceration, while still high, is plummeting. Evidence-builders are showing the way. The call for the closure of Long Creek does not mean that there are not

some young people for whom secure confinement is the right and necessary solution. But even for them, harsh, punitive, inhumane, and developmentally inappropriate settings are not the right place; certainly not if the goal is — as it should be — positive youth development and rehabilitation.

I encourage you to support LD1668 and am available for any questions.