



Maine Sheriffs' Association

"One Team, One Mission"

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March 4, 2022

L.D. 756 – An Act Regarding Criminal Services for Juveniles

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice, my name is Scott Kane. I am the Sheriff of Hancock County and here on behalf of the Maine Sheriffs Association.

Maine sheriffs discussed this bill and voted unanimously **Opposed to L.D. 756 – An Act Regarding Criminal Services for Juveniles.**

The topic of juvenile incarceration in this committee is one that we feel is often completely misunderstood. Maine sheriffs are parents, we're grandparents, we are family members who deeply feel empathy towards young adults. We understand that young minds are not fully developed and we agree that appropriate facilities and programs are essential for those who make devastating choices. We are all on the same page with everyone in this committee.

With five-hundred and sixty-three years of collective experience, Maine Sheriffs feel highly qualified to speak to the circumstances surrounding egregious choices made by the youth you're trying to serve in L.D. 756. There are children/young adults that commit murder. There are young adults who commit arson. There are young adults who irreparably destroy the lives of others. These individuals are not the norm, but the State has a responsibility not only to those youth who commit serious crimes, but to others they could potentially harm.

Long Creek Youth Development Center not only meets the needs of those youth who reside there, but their programs enhance the lives of those they serve. The facility is licensed to house up to 164 youth. Not all juvenile offenders require this level of security, and Long Creek has reduced its population to less than 20% of its capacity. This bill is yet another effort to close this vital facility. Just last week, we heard a member of this esteemed committee share that a resident of Long Creek met with him and told him that Long Creek "saved his life". This is the kind of success story you need to take into consideration when contemplating your vote on this bill.

Long Creek provides education, behavioral health, medical, worship services, and recreational services in a secure environment. If I were to ask this committee, how many youth are currently committed in Long Creek today, would you, the decision-makers, know the answer? As of this morning, twenty male and two female youth are committed at Long Creek. These twenty-two youth have one-on-one attention from caring, invested professionals. To mandate that the state scrap this facility and spending MILLIONS to recreate another system is disappointing at best.

When Maine sheriffs discuss bills such as LD 756, the common reoccurring question that remains unanswered is this, "What about the victims?" Has this committee taken the time to speak to the family who witnessed a brutal attack on their mother? While the youth who broke into the home and viciously attacked a parent in front of young children may have mental health or substance abuse challenges, and we're not discounting those facts, the criminal act has broken the lives of those harmed in its wake.

The lettering on the door of this room reads, "The Joint Standing Committee of Criminal Justice and Public Safety". We urge all members of this committee to remember that you're responsible for safety of the public and justice for those who have fallen victim to criminal activity. Respectfully, reducing accountability and eliminating a facility that ensures public safety is, in the opinion of Maine sheriffs, not in the best interest of Maine's citizens. We strongly urge this committee to keep the doors of Long Creek open by voting Ought Not To Pass on LD 756.

Maine sheriffs graciously appreciate the time to share our observations and position with this committee.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Scott Kane
Maine Sheriffs' Association