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**Permanent
Commission**
**RACIAL, INDIGENOUS
& TRIBAL POPULATIONS**

**Testimony of the
Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal
Populations**

In Support of LD 756,

“An Act Regarding Criminal Services for Juveniles”

Friday, March 4, 2022

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is Bruce King, and I am Co-Executive Director of Maine Inside Out, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a movement for transformative justice, in which communities acknowledge and attend to the social, structural and systemic roots of crime and harm. Today, I am here representing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations (“Permanent Commission”), as a Commissioner representing a historically disadvantaged racial population of the State.

I am honored to offer testimony in support of LD 756, “An Act Regarding Criminal Services for Juveniles.” We extend deep gratitude to Rep. Victoria Morales for introducing this bill.

The Permanent Commission is an independent entity with a mission to work toward ending structural racism so all communities can thrive. For too long, Maine and the United States have allowed the institutions and policies that drive structural racism to continue. These structures hurt all of us, including rural Mainers, Black and African American people, Indigenous people, other peoples of color, and all Maine residents struggling to thrive under these systems. To achieve its mission, the Permanent Commission is empowered to advise and consult all three branches of Maine government, and to introduce legislation. As well, the Permanent Commission examines racial disparities as one tool to combat structural racism and improve the quality of life for all Mainers.

Most of us believe that every child, whatever their color, background, or zip code, has the right to learn in a supportive environment that respects their humanity, upholds their dignity, and responds fairly to mistakes and mis-steps. The current institutional system is damaging to young people,¹ as we have seen in recent, well-documented incidents². People are ready to move our money away from policing and arresting children and toward the proven, evidence-based solutions that set our kids up for fulfilling lives in their communities. This will not be possible

¹ Annie E. Case Foundation, No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration, Annie E. Case Foundation, 2011, <https://www.aecf.org/resources/no-place-for-kids-full-report>.

² Mark Soler, Lisa Macaluso, Regina Mitchell, Report On Causes Of Recent Disturbances At Long Creek Youth Development Center, Center for Children’s Law and Policy, 2021, https://www.aclumaine.org/sites/default/files/cclp_report_on_incidents_at_long_creek_-_final.pdf

without investment and individualized care. This bill invests in the resources and processes to meet that need.

As a member of the Permanent Commission and an historically disadvantaged population, it is important that I point out that juvenile justice is an issue that disproportionately targets Black and African American, Indigenous, and Latino kids. The reasons, of course, are varied. Lack of resources for communities and individuals, bias in policing, and siloed, disconnected systems all result in greater contact with the justice system and poorer outcomes for youth of color. Additionally, cultural competency around the norms of their communities needs to be factored in when talking about this issue. The mandate of individualized service plans may create a pathway to address these factors and support all youth in Maine who experience challenges that contribute to their contact with the justice system. The research is vast and reinforces the hypothesis that individual engagement helps change minds and relationships in ways that system structures fail to do.

It is my hope that with the passage of this bill we can encourage and support the deepening of humanization of system-impacted young people and offer options in a continuum of care that will be responsive to the needs of youth from diverse backgrounds in a way that treats them as the people they are.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill. We respectfully urge you to support LD 756. I am happy to answer any questions, or provide additional information if desired.