

## POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

### LD 756, An Act Regarding Criminal Services for Juveniles

#### Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine strongly supports the passage of *An Act Regarding Criminal Services for Juveniles*. NAMI Maine supports the large number of individual and families seeking treatment and support services to maintain stability in the community while managing the requirements and interactions with the criminal justice system. Young people involved in the juvenile justice system disproportionately represent juveniles with high levels of trauma, emerging mental health and substance use disorder challenges, and inadequate access to resources and supports.

When the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Studies were initially released in 1998, it was found that childhood abuse, household dysfunction, and neglect were identified as significant risk factors in many chronic medical conditions and death in adulthood. Juveniles involved in the criminal justice system, on average, present with three times higher ACEs scores than their non-criminal justice involved peers. Youth with higher ACEs scores are more likely to suffer from higher rates of substance use disorders, self-harm, disruptive behaviors, and school related issues. The impact of childhood trauma has been significantly studied and it has been found that providing trauma-informed, resiliency-based interventions and supports decreases the lasting impacts of those experiences.

Research indicates that as many as 70% of justice involved youth have a diagnosable mental health condition. Research also indicates that nearly one in five youth entering the juvenile justice system meet criteria for substance use disorders<sup>1</sup>. Limited access to evidence-based treatments often results in many of these young people receiving minimal, if any treatment, until they interface with the criminal justice system. In fact, 20% of young people will interface with the criminal justice system as their first formal system of care. This results in high numbers of young people who will be entwined in the criminal justice system with no assistance or support to facilitate long term and lasting recovery. On a follow-up study of justice involved youth, 76% of the individuals were diagnosed with a substance use disorder 7 years post release from the juvenile correction facility.

NAMI Maine appreciates that the State of Maine is in difficult fiscal position during these times. However, investment in this high risk population to ensure they are able to receive evidence-based supportive treatment will reduce the long-term financial impacts on the state. As you work to address the opiate crisis impacting our state, this is a pro-active measure to attempt to curb the rising tide of the impacts. This is a cost saving measure- both financially as well as in the lives it can impact and save.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources/hpr-resources/juvenile-drug-courts-help-youth>

#### LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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[www.namimaine.org/advocacy](http://www.namimaine.org/advocacy)

**ABOUT NAMI MAINE:** *Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.*

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