

March 1, 2022

**To: The Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety**

**Re: Testifying Neither For Nor Against LD 756: An Act Regarding Criminal Services for Juveniles**

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Mara Sanchez, and I am a Policy Associate at the Cutler Institute, which is housed at the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine. I am here to provide information to the Committee to aid your consideration of LD 756 without testifying for or against.

I am a part of the Place Matters team, which is a group of researchers working on a portfolio of projects focused on supporting the redesign, implementation, and evaluation of a community-based continuum of care for transition-aged youth and other individuals impacted by the justice system. My goal with this testimony is to share some of the data and research that has already been gathered by Place Matters and is relevant to the goals of LD 756.

LD 756 seeks to invest in a community-based continuum of care in Maine that is aligned with the recommendations for a continuum of care outlined in the [first Place Matters report](#) released in 2019. This bill also calls for funding towards the expansion of community-based services to youth either in or at risk of justice involvement. Understanding the social and economic factors influencing such youth and related outcomes was the focus of the [second Place Matters report](#). That report also includes a baseline of population-level indicators for the type of investment proposed in LD 756. A [third report](#) released in 2020 took this work one step further by synthesizing the data analysis and policy research contained in the first two reports to provide insights and recommendations on how to inform investments in a community-based continuum of care, specifically in Androscoggin county. Since the release of the Androscoggin County report, [asset mapping has been completed](#) in every county in Maine, and these data are available for and intended to inform the type of investments being put proposed in LD 756. Further, the recommendations of needs and opportunities for investment highlighted in the aforementioned reports have been confirmed by the voices of systems-involved young people across Maine and included in yet [another report](#) that was released in 2021.

The need to expand community-based services to better support system-involved youth is also a recommendation that came out of the Maine Department of Corrections' Regional Care Team (RCT) initiative, which is a collaborative effort that has integrated Place Matters research and support. In that initiative's [first year review report](#) from late last year, the primary needs of youth referred are the same as those lifted up by previous Place Matters research, and corroborate the data, findings, and recommendations gathered by Place Matters over the past four years. These needs are also the focus of LD 756.

Some gaps between needs and assets that have come to light through Place Matters research:

- A lack of community reintegration services across the state, confirmed by multiple stakeholders and in data collected by the RCT initiative
- Concentration of services and resources along major transportation corridors and service deserts in many rural areas, especially in more rural counties
- Lack of homeless youth services, restorative justice organizations, and diversion programming in many counties

With further analysis, it is possible to explore mismatches between need and numbers served in every county. For example, in Somerset County, there are approximately 100 referrals to the youth justice system every year, but asset mapping in that county uncovered no restorative justice organizations and no organizations providing diversion programming. Similar examples of this kind of gap are included in the [Androscoggin County report](#), and could be analyzed for every county in Maine to be supportive of LD 756, if passed.

Increasing the use of community-based services to young people as an alternative to secure confinement has been shown to [cost less](#), be more effective at [reducing recidivism](#), and achieve [better outcomes](#). The research accomplished to date by the Place Matters initiative could support the goals of LD 756, which seeks to increase the use of community-based services and meet the needs of young people without incarceration or institutionalization in other settings.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Mara Sanchez, MPPM

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