

Dominick Morrison  
Portland Maine  
LD 1779

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Portland, Maine  
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Re: L.D. 1779, An Act to Develop a Continuum of Care for Youth Involved in the Justice System and to Develop Alternatives for Juveniles Incarcerated in Long Creek Youth Development Center

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Dominick Morrison and I am a youth steering committee with Maine Youth Justice. I reside in Portland, Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1779.

I have experience at Long Creek and in the juvenile justice system. I was sentenced to long creek when I was 15. I was on probation at 14. The system has caused me harm in many ways from being institutionalized to having to immediately adjust to society after being locked in a metal cell all alone. Knowing first hand, I want to shine light upon all the trauma that happens within LCYDC. I want people to see that locking up our youth doesn't actually teach them anything, it doesn't get to the root of their suffering. We're dealing with young teens that have been hurt by the adults in their lives and they need more love and understanding not incarceration with no answers. Any type of locked cell does not provide rehabilitation. It's traumatizing the minute you walk into Long Creek, your childhood is gone. There is no bigger punishment other than going to Long Creek as a juvenile.

What I needed instead of Longcreek and long before I was sent there is I needed someone to understand why I was so angry and to ask me how I was feeling. I needed more learning opportunities with my hands, not just the standard learning with textbooks. What I needed was someone who listened to me and actually heard me. What I got instead was being tossed around in foster care, to grow up in hospital beds and crisis beds and then thrown into Long Creek. I experienced prone restraint & hundreds of hours of pod time, observation & being handcuffed and shackled and dragged out of the unit at 15. I was being wrestled down by grown adult guards all because I didn't want to remain in lock down.

Maine doesnt need more incarceration for youth. Maine is going forward in the direction of less incarceration and more alternatives, and this bill will create an entity that represents the communities who know best about what services Maine needs to invest in.

The solutions are simple. We need to build programs that allow youth that don't have anybody to turn to, to have a space where they can thrive and feel like they belong. We need programs that offer young people a chance to be educated, fed, housed, clothed. We need to build supports outside of a prison cell. Maine needs to create more housing, job opportunities, sober houses, rehabilitation centers that aren't locked doors. We need mental health services, funded education, and places where kids can go and feel safe in their communities.

This bill will impact so many young vibrant youth as well as me. This bill ensures closure and solitude for all the trauma LCYDC caused and it offers an opportunity that doesn't imply a prison. I want to see a healthy community that is surrounded by loyalty, love, honor, and respect. I want to see our youth striving to be their best self with healthy options. In summary, LD 1779 would work towards that vision. For these reasons, I request this Committee to vote ought to pass on LD 1779.

Thank you for your time,  
Dominick Morrison