



Restorative Justice Project Maine

24 April 2025

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee;

I write to express strong support for the inclusion of a restorative practitioner in the proposed comprehensive study of family courts in Maine (LD 1618). Restorative justice is not only a field of study that identifies opportunities for systemic improvement but a deeply relevant practice that aligns with the core goals of family court: to protect the well-being of children, foster healthier relationships, and support long-term healing and resolution within families. I should know; I am currently a team member of Maine's District VI Adult Treatment Court under the aegis of Judge John Martin.

Restorative practitioners bring a unique perspective that is grounded in empathy, accountability, and community-based problem-solving. They are trained to hold space for difficult conversations, help individuals understand the impact of their actions, and co-create agreements that reflect the needs of all parties involved. This approach can be especially powerful in family court contexts, where outcomes are deeply personal and long-lasting. The Restorative Justice Project Maine, where I work, already receives cases from courts involving interpersonal, familial harm to offer restorative options. Often, the participants are seeking resources, and support in communicating. These participants frequently report feeling victimized by the legal-criminal proceedings but supported by restorative options.

Maine's family courts are tasked with navigating incredibly complex and emotionally charged situations—divorce, custody, protection from abuse, and more. These cases often involve deep interpersonal harm and trauma. Restorative practices can complement the legal process by:

- Offering non-adversarial pathways to resolution that reduce conflict and support cooperative co-parenting.
- Helping children and parents communicate more effectively, especially in the aftermath of family separation.
- Providing trauma-informed alternatives that can improve mental health outcomes and reduce recidivism in high-conflict cases.

Excluding restorative voices from this study would mean missing an opportunity to explore innovative, community-rooted approaches that are already being used successfully in other areas of the justice system, including juvenile and criminal courts. Including restorative practitioners in the study ensures a fuller understanding of how Maine's family courts can evolve to better serve families in a humane, holistic, and healing way.

Restorative Justice Project Maine

P.O. Box 141, Belfast, ME 04915 • T 207.338.2742 • www.rjpmaine.org



Restorative Justice Project **Maine**

I urge you to ensure that restorative justice professionals have a seat at the table in this important work.

Respectfully,

Sarah Dyer, PhD

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Sarah Dyer
Restorative Justice Project Maine
LD 1618

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