

Testimony before the 132nd Maine Legislature.

Judiciary Committee

Testimony in favor of LD 1965: Resolve, to Establish a Task Force to Create a Court Navigation Program Plan

Chairpersons Senator Carney and Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Committee, my name is Suzanne Rudalevige and I live in Cape Elizabeth.

I want to say, up front, that my vision of making our Criminal Justice System more effective is to change our perspective from one focused on punishment to one which espouses a future oriented plan in which healing for both victim and violator is addressed in a holistic manner. This is the philosophy of Restorative Justice: helping the victim to come to terms with what has occurred and heal as much as possible from the damage done; encouraging the one who has done the harm to true accountability for his/her actions with appropriate restitution in whatever form; and including the community in finding this path forward.

I am much impressed with the restorative justice work of Danielle Sered at Common Justice in Brooklyn , NY, and highly recommend her book "Until We Reckon."

However, I definitely agree that providing the named support services ---- if actually delivered-- would promote the safety of the community and help those embroiled in the criminal system to find their footing to a more productive life.

I have recently been learning about the work of the Criminal Justice Taskforce, headed up by Deborah Ramirez, at Northeastern University School of Law's Center for Law, Equity and Race (CLEAR).

Massachusetts now has 18 Community Justice Support Centers throughout MA , funded by the Commonwealth, which can be accessed by anyone in the criminal system, whether in or out of prison/jail. **This is a viable model for us in Maine to provide court navigation.** There is also emphasis on training judges in restorative justice so that, with those judges, there can be a well-founded understanding of appropriate alternative options beyond the "usual" system --- i.e. looking for remedies , rather than punishment.

The whole project remains part of the traditional court system but offers more diversion possibilities. This could conceivably have a beneficial effect on the willingness of defense attorneys to serve, or even reduce the number of attorneys required for criminal cases.

I am happy to supply information about the MA undertaking, if requested.

Thank you.