



*"Homelessness played a large part in why I was sent to Long Creek, and I know that's true for many of the youth who are sent there. A prison is not a home. It might be an 'easy' answer, but it's not the right answer."* – 21, Biddeford

# Maine Youth Justice's Statement of Principles

**We believe** the best place for children and youth to grow and thrive is in the community with the support of friends and family. We are committed to advocating for alternatives to incarceration that respond to the needs of young people by meeting them where they are.

**We believe** that the harm caused by incarceration ripples throughout entire communities and touches everyone.

**We believe** that safety comes through strengthening communities, addressing the root causes of harm, and promoting individual and collective well-being, not incarceration.

**We believe** that no one is disposable. True justice is preventing and repairing harm and promoting healing, not punishment or retribution.

**We oppose** oppression in all forms for youth and adults.

**We believe** that the justice system is biased and marginalizes populations based on their race, religion, gender identity and expression, class, ability, addiction and mental health status, and sexual orientation.

**We believe** in the power of the collective. We seek to form alliances through building trust, open communication and vulnerability by collaborating with those who have lived experience with the justice system and incarceration and those who do not.

**We believe** in self advocacy and determination. Youth and those most impacted by the justice system must lead the transformation of the juvenile justice system.

**We believe** that family is chosen and young people should be able to determine who that is for them.

**We believe** that all people deserve to be treated with dignity, respect and love.



The Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment & Reinvestment Task Force held three public forums across the state to listen to community members share their stories about youth incarceration and the justice system.

Young people, immigrants, native people, people of color, LGBTQ+ people, former workers of these institutions, came to advocate for a single vision- Long Creek isn't working for youth, it isn't working for community, and it isn't working for workers. The last youth prison in Maine must be closed to reinvest millions of dollars in community based alternatives to incarceration.

We are calling for leaders of Maine to listen to young people and those hurting in their state. Our summary of the public forums is below.

## What We Learned

### LEWISTON

Police profiling and harassment

Lack of cultural competency

- *Lack of understanding from law enforcement about how to have positive relationships with young black folks and immigrant families*

Education system failing to serve young people

- *Lewiston black students are 6x more likely to be expelled from school than white students. Hispanic students are 51 times more likely to be expelled than white students (Dept. of Education, Office for Civil Rights)*

### BANGOR

Class distinction between who gets caught up in the system and who doesn't

Policing disproportionately target native and LGBTQ communities

Young, system involved people who are dealing with mental illness need healthcare, not prison

We need resources beyond the Department of Corrections to provide programming and care for young people

### AUGUSTA

Young people don't have access to community programs or resources, while college students do.

Young people are trapped in the system because of rampant houselessness and poverty

- *2,500 homeless students in Maine in 2017*
- *Youth homelessness has increased by 30% in Maine in the last 2 years*

If it's more than a paycheck, adults would be listening to young people

To support workers, the system has to change to give them the ability to care for young people

## PORTLAND

The Boys Training Center, now known as Long Creek Youth Development Center, was established in 1853 with the purpose of education and rehabilitation of young men in South Portland.

This facility was sued multiple times and the subject of federal investigations for abuse and mistreatment of youth. It was known for frequently using up to months of solitary confinement and restraint chairs - traumatizing children for life.

These facilities can and must be repurposed to prevent youth from being trapped inside ineffective and cruel carceral systems. The old Maine Youth Center was used to build Brick Hill Cottages, an affordable housing development in South Portland. Nine out of ten residents in South Portland's West End are renters. This additional housing is badly needed to serve this community.

Young people across the state have told their leaders that housing insecurity is one of the biggest issues affecting their lives. The opportunities presented by the closure of Long Creek Youth Development Center will bring \$17.5 million dollars to be reinvested in communities.

### **We have some ideas about where that money should go.**

**Solution 1:** Invest in Our Communities.

**Solution 2:** Reimagine the Role of Police.

**Solution 3:** Invest in Credible Messengers.

**Solution 4:** Shut down the School-to-Prison Pipeline.

**Solution 5:** Fund Programs to Divert Youth from Arrest, Prosecution, and Incarceration.

**Solution 6:** Create a New Model for Small, Community-based Residential Programs.

**Solution 7:** Take the Responsibility for Youth Justice and Community Reinvestment out of the Maine Department of Corrections.

**Solution 8:** Repurpose Long Creek.

