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RANDALL A. LIBERTY  
COMMISSIONER

December 8, 2021

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Maine Department of Corrections Releases Long Creek Assessment, Continues Implementation of Reforms in Wake of August & September Incidents**

The Maine Department of Corrections (MDOC) today released a report from the Center for Children's Law and Policy (CCLP) assessing underlying factors that contributed to disturbances at Long Creek Youth Development Center (LCYDC) in August and September. MDOC requested the outside, point-in-time assessment while the Department also conducted its own internal investigation into the incidents.

CCLP's assessment confirms the MDOC's findings -- including the impact that staffing shortages and resident inactivity played in the sudden uptick of destructive disturbances that resulted in damages of more than \$160,000 to the facility -- and reaffirms the actions taken by MDOC in the wake of the incidents.

"We are grateful for the ongoing partnership with CCLP and their perspective of the factors that contributed to the incidents at Long Creek. As a department, we learned from our internal review and have learned further still from the review CCLP provided," said Randall A. Liberty, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Corrections. "Their findings align with many of ours, including the importance of promoting a healthy environment for youth. CCLP's assessment reaffirms the importance of the actions we have taken at Long Creek since the incidents, including prioritizing social outlets, adding more dedicated staff, and enhancing staff's ability to ensuring a therapeutic environment."

In the days following the incidents, the MDOC implemented immediate changes to many of the policies and practices the CCLP outlined as contributing factors. These reforms include implementing de-escalation practice drills and role playing scenarios for staff in order to better handle youth who may become aggressive, better training to identify when to call in mental health clinicians, and better training on when and how to utilize the method for the therapeutic prone position and other intervention strategies.

Further, the department will continue to address issues in the CCLP point in time assessment, including those issues exacerbated by COVID, such as boredom, staffing shortages, lack of in-person visits, and reduced community-based supports.

LCYDC's Board of Visitors is actively involved and meeting regularly. The mental health program is fully staffed, twelve new Juvenile Program Workers have been hired since August, the visitation and the volunteer

program have been reopened and the school at LCYDC is fully staffed, with a new principal, and students are matriculating through, receiving positive reinforcement for reaching educational goals. Evening routines for committed and detained youth now include social activities between residents and with staff, including basketball and other sports, board games, outdoor time, music, movies, and skills-based leisure like cooking. Staff are reporting an environment that lends itself to more opportunities to praise youth for making positive and healthy choices.

LCYDC provides a comprehensive array of treatment services and risk-reduction through education, behavioral health, medical, recreational, and volunteer services. The A.R. Gould School inside LCYDC is fully accredited and certified by the Maine Department of Education to provide primary, secondary, high school equivalency and post-secondary education to both the detained and committed population. Behavioral health treatment and programming is available for any youth in the facility and includes psychiatry; psychology; individual, group, and family counseling; substance use treatment; and problem sexual behavior treatment. LCYDC is served by a contracted medical and dental provider that provides 24/7 medical care through pediatricians, nurse practitioners, dentists and nurses.

LCYDC staff, Juvenile Community Corrections Officers (JCCO), and MDOC administration continue to work with stakeholders to prioritize serving youth in community-settings rather than in the secure facility.

“We are committed to implementing the juvenile justice reforms we began in earnest with so many partners,” Liberty continued. “Working with Juvenile Justice Advisory Group, the Regional Care Teams, members of the Legislature and advocacy organizations, we stand committed to the interventions and investments that help keep the population of LCYDC as low as possible and ensure that youth who are better served in their community are actually served in their community.”

The Department’s newly named Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Services, Christine Thibeault, who takes her position at the end of December will be involved in the continued implementation of programs, practices, and policies that advance the department’s focus on diversion. Thibeault, with twenty-six years of experience working in the juvenile justice system, will also focus on matters like changes to the behavior management level system and response to critical incidents.

“We take seriously the issues raised by CCLP and we will continue to improve. Our mission remains centered on providing a rehabilitative environment for those youth committed to Long Creek by a judge. We best protect public safety by expanding rehabilitative services for youth at the facility and within communities,” said Thibeault.

The incidents reviewed by CCLP – which occurred on August 2, August 9, August 30, September 11, and September 13 – involved altercations between residents and staff after residents in the facility acted in a manner that posed a serious danger to themselves, other residents, and LCYDC staff, including, in some cases, throwing furniture into windows, breaking furniture apart to use as weapons, assaulting other residents and staff, flooding the residence hall resulting in destruction of property, and refusing to cooperate with de-escalation tactics. In some cases where staff efforts at de-escalation were unsuccessful, staff members intervened to restore order and because of these efforts, there was no serious bodily injury.

The timeframe during which the incidents occurred also saw a near-doubling of the resident population at LCYDC along with a marked increase in residents who are considered “high-risk” because they have a higher level of acuity. Acuity is the level of risk that a resident presents to public safety and is a measure of aggressive or criminogenic behavior combined with the need for behavioral intervention or mental health services. A resident is considered high-risk if they have been charged with crimes such as arson, criminal threatening with a weapon, gross sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated assault, and those residents are placed in specific programming and housing.



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Currently, LCYDC has a total population of 20 committed juveniles, committed by a judge for offenses including gross sexual and aggravated assault, burglary, manslaughter, and aggravated trafficking. There are 10 detained juveniles who have been charged with crimes including gross sexual and aggravated assault robbery and burglary. LCYDC is the state's only juvenile facility with capacity for 166 juveniles.

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