

# Initiative to End Girls' Incarceration Maine

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Juvenile Justice Advisory Group

January 21, 2022

# Vera's Work in Maine

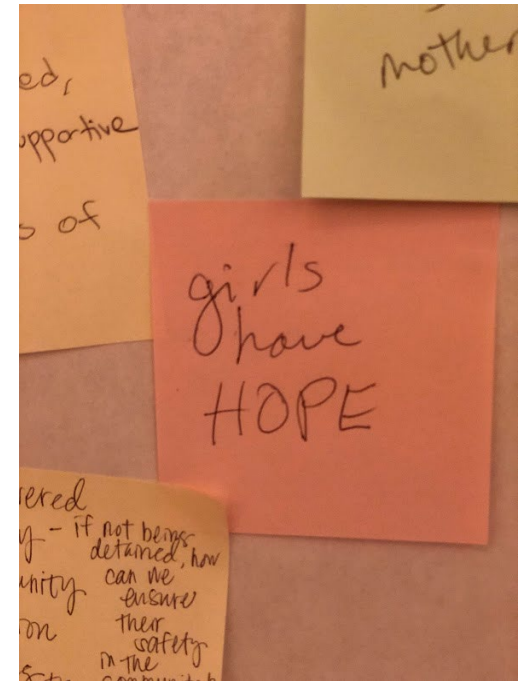
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- In 2019, the Vera Institute of Justice began working with the Maine Department of Corrections and the Cumberland County Attorney General's Office to help leaders in Maine better understand the needs of system impacted girls and gender expansive youth.
- Vera worked with leadership to prioritize girls in diversion programming, regional care team planning, cutting the total annual detention admissions to girls' units by 80%, and cutting the annual number of new commitments for girls by 66%.
- This work led to a monthly average of only three girls admitted to detention after arrests and 9 months at zero girls committed girls in 2020.

# Focus on JJ and Housing Instability

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- Vera case file review, CCLP System Assessment, RCT report, all highlighted housing needs
- LD 546 prohibits detention to “provide care” but housing needs persist
- Vera undertook a landscape analysis of youth homelessness in Maine beginning in late 2019
- Continuing to learn from youth homelessness providers as services expand throughout the state
- As Maine continues to reduce incarceration, housing-related services will become an even more important part of community-based response.



# Pathways between JJ and Housing Issues

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- Economic pressures from familial housing instability
- Family conflict
- Trauma
- Conflict in institutional placements
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)
- Survival offenses

Many of these can contribute to girls being incarcerated because there is "nowhere else for them to go."

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# Youth Homelessness Continuum

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## **Prevention Services and Housing\***

- Family counseling/other in-home services, Crisis housing

## **Early and Crisis Intervention Services and Housing\***

- Crisis hotlines; Respite care; Street outreach; Drop in centers;
- Reunification services; System responses; Short term housing/services/basic needs provision (e.g., Basic Center Programs); Host homes

## **Long-Term Services and Housing\***

- Educational, vocational, and employment services; Life skills development; Permanent connection supports; Transitional housing

## **Other Services\***

- Aftercare services; Cross-cutting support services

\*Note that there will be overlap between services in these categories; see National Network for Youth's [Proposed System to End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness](#)

# Maine's YH Continuum

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## **Prevention Services and Housing**

- New Beginnings family mediation, Penquis prevention services

## **Early and Crisis Intervention Services and Housing**

- Three main providers: New Beginnings (Lewiston), Shaw House (Bangor) and Preble Street (Portland)
- Offer hotlines, street outreach, drop in centers, emergency shelter.
- Additional providers include The Landing Place (Drop in Center and expanding services in Knox Cty.), MidCoast Community Alliance (Youth Center), Northern Lighthouse (opening shelter), and several host home providers (including Ryan Home Project in Berwick and Housing Resources for Youth in Brunswick).

## **Long-Term Services and Housing**

- Transitional housing (New Beginnings, Shaw House, Preble Street)

**\*\*Biggest gaps are in rural areas, longer term services;** HUD YHDP grant will address some (but not all) of these gaps for 2 years.

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# Recommendations

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## **Expand RHY services**

- Support maintaining/expanding current RHY programming
  - Can serve as prevention and/or alternative to incarceration/community-based care
  - Particularly long-term options (e.g., transitional housing), host homes, and needs in rural areas
- Expand access to family mediation
- Address guardianship options and other (civil) legal needs
- Expand respite care
- Expand and improve services for specialized populations
- Provide support to aid housing choice voucher programs and expand housing availability throughout Maine

# Recommendations (continued)

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## **Improve Crisis Response in the Community and Across Systems Serving Children and Families**

- Crisis response model protocol for RTCs/institutional care settings
- Alternative responses to family conflict

## **Prevent Incarceration and Delayed Release due to Housing Instability**

- Develop a protocol for reviewing and finding solutions
  - Regional Care Teams
- Pilot peer parent coaches

## **Effectively Respond to Runaway Behavior**

- No detention based on Failure to Appear (FTA) and runaway warrants
- Safety planning with young people around running away



# Questions?

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