

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.
Commissioner



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January 11, 2024

Senator Joseph Baldacci, Chair
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 779 – *An Act to Create a Separate Department of Child and Family Services*

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the input of the Department of Health and Human Services on LD 779, *An Act to Create a Separate Department of Child and Family Services*. This bill would remove all current functions of the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) from the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as additional programming such as maternal child health services (including home visiting), child support, and Head Start, and place them in a new administrative agency, the Department of Child and Family Services.

The Department has expressed concerns about this proposal in the past. Significant work has been done, with the support and encouragement of the Legislature and stakeholders, to break down silos and reduce bureaucratic burden between and among programs that serve children and families of Maine. Separating child and family services from the Department that also coordinates and pays for basic needs like food supports, MaineCare, and services for mental health and substance use disorders could reduce effective child and family supports and duplicate administrative functions.

That said, the health, safety, and wellbeing of Maine people is our north star and the Department remains open to all policy ideas that are supported by evidence and can help achieve our mission. As such, the Department would reconsider this position if an in-depth review indicates that the cost of a new department for child and family services could improve child safety more than other investments. Such a review could be accomplished through the existing Blue Ribbon Commission to Study the Organization of and Service Delivery by the Department of Health and Human Services, which will meet through the summer and fall of 2024 and report to the Legislature in November 2024. Alternatively, this could be done by an independent organization with expertise in state government structure and program management. We would recommend that this proposal be considered only after such a review.

We appreciate the Committee's consideration of all proposals that could improve the lives of and support for children and families in Maine, and commit to engaging with you on this topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne M. Lambrew".

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.
Commissioner