



Jeffrey Timberlake
Senator, District 17

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

June 18, 2024

Bobbi Johnson, OCFS Director
Department of Health and Human Services
11 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Ms. Johnson:

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the Department of Health and Human Services having recently contracted Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) to conduct a sweeping management review of the Office of Child and Family Services for identifying institutional and structural deficiencies within the Office.

As you are aware, similar audits and investigations have been undertaken regularly in recent years through the efforts of the Legislature's Government Oversight Committee (GOC), the Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA), the Casey Family Foundation, Maine's Child Welfare Ombudsman, and the non-profit organization Walk a Mile in Their Shoes. These reviews have yielded results that share a good deal of overlap with the findings of PCG.

As such, this letter is not intended to call into question the efficacy or competence of PCG, but rather to question the necessity of dispensing nearly \$250,000 in taxpayer dollars to identify internal shortcomings that have become largely well established. It strikes me as wasteful, redundant and somewhat dismissive of the far-reaching efforts put forth by these entities and the Maine Legislature.

Upon review of PCG's primary findings, we can see similar themes already unearthed through previous watchdog reports. These themes include the lack of staff retention leading to overburdened caseworkers, psychological burnout, and loss of a healthy work-life balance for these same workers. Additional findings include a perceived lack of support from upper management in the form of weak training, poorly defined decision-making hierarchies, and generally unclear communication. Lastly, our findings also identified a growing risk of physical harm to caseworkers from being thrust into unsafe environments without adequate support.

While it is encouraging that this independent group has further confirmed these alarming trends – and I actually agree with some of their recommendations – the decision to compound our investigative efforts at this late stage appears emblematic of the waste and inefficiency all too

often witnessed within our state agencies. There may be merit to the notion that PCG's audit is distinct due to the comprehensive structural remedies they were tasked to identify, but the department appears to portray a cavalier attitude toward the nearly identical findings by the Government Oversight Committee. It begs the question as to why the department did not immediately begin to implement corrective measures in the wake of this initial collection of reports.

Going forward, I would also like to know what steps are being taken to address other concerns identified by the Government Oversight Committee, including a retaliatory culture, poor safety decision-making by staff that has led to a record number of deaths, and moving to a team-based field structure.

I look forward to discussing this matter in greater detail in the very near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeff Timberlake". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Jeffrey Timberlake
State Senator, District 17

Cc: The Honorable Craig Hickman, Senate Chair, GOC
The Honorable Jessica Fay, House Chair, GOC
Members, GOC Committee