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### Review of Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Licensing

On February 28, 2014, the GOC voted to place a review of the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Licensing and Regulation of Child Care Providers on OPEGA's Work Plan. The Chairs of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services requested this review after findings of child abuse and neglect at a child care center in Lyman, ME. Concurrently, OPEGA received complaints from several DHHS child care licensing workers raising concerns about the safety of children in child care and the agency's performance with regard to the timeliness of investigations and enforcement actions.

OPEGA conducted preliminary research and found that DHHS was well aware of the issues, had developed a strategic plan to enhance oversight of child care facilities and address risks to children in care, and was actively implementing that plan. OPEGA then recommended that the GOC suspend the review to provide time for implementation of these initiatives prior to evaluation of the changes. On June 26, 2014, the GOC voted to suspend the review for one year and requested periodic updates from DHHS to monitor progress. In February 2015, and again in August 2015, DHHS briefed the GOC on status of implementation of the strategic plan. At its August 2015 meeting, the GOC reviewed potential scope questions that could be pursued should OPEGA resume the review.

In September 2015, the GOC directed OPEGA to resume work on this review when staff resources became available. OPEGA resumed its work in April 2016. As a foundation for the next phase of the project, OPEGA revisited the preliminary research, reviewed the updates from DHHS to the GOC during 2015, and gathered updated information from DHHS regarding Children's Licensing as of May 2016. Updates covered the organizational structure, governing statutes, rulemaking, data systems, and policies and procedures.

On May 19, 2016, the GOC approved four scope questions for the review of Children's Licensing:

1. How does Children's Licensing become aware of violations of licensing rules and potential child abuse and neglect in child care settings?
2. To what extent does Children's Licensing investigate and act on reports of child care licensing violations in a timely and effective manner?
3. To what extent does Children's Licensing investigate and act on reports of child abuse and neglect in a timely and effective manner?
4. To what extent does DHHS notify current and prospective child care clients (parents) of allegations and findings of licensing violations and of child abuse/neglect in a timely manner?

OPEGA expects to complete this review in the fourth quarter of 2016.