



SEN. CRAIG V. HICKMAN, SENATE CHAIR
REP. ANNE-MARIE MASTRACCIO, HOUSE CHAIR

MEMBERS:

SEN. JILL C. DUSON
SEN. BRADLEE T. FARRIN
SEN. STACEY GUERIN
SEN. JEFF TIMBERLAKE
SEN. MIKE TIPPING
REP. JOHN M. EDER
REP. ADAM LEE
REP. MICHAEL H. LEMELIN
REP. CHAD PERKINS
REP. HOLLY B. STOVER

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE
GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY
February 27, 2026

Call to Order

The Chair, Senator Hickman, called the Government Oversight Committee to order at approximately 9:35 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

Senators: Senator Hickman, Senator Farrin, Senator Guerin, Senator Timberlake
Attending Via Zoom: Senator Duson
Absent: Senator Tipping

Representatives: Representative Mastraccio, Representative Lee, Representative Lemelin,
Representative Perkins, Representative Stover
Attending Via Zoom: Representative Eder

Legislative Staff: Peter Schleck, Director, OPEGA
Matt Kruk, Principal Analyst, OPEGA
Jennifer Greiner, OPEGA Administrative Secretary/GOC Clerk

Others: Bobbi Johnson, Director, Office of Child and Family Services

Introduction of Committee Members

The members of the Committee introduced themselves.

New Business

To watch this meeting - the recorded Live Stream can be viewed here: [February 27, 2026 GOC Meeting](#)

Meeting Summary – February 13, 2026

A copy of this Meeting Summary can be found here: [February 13, 2026, GOC Meeting Summary](#)

The Committee accepted and approved this meeting summary.

OPEGA Report Presentation: Timeliness of Office of Child and Family Services Child Care Payments

Sen. Hickman invited Director Schleck to present OPEGA’s Report: *Office of Child and Family Services: Timeliness of Child Care Payments*.

A copy of this Report may be found here: [Timeliness of Child Care Payments](#).

A copy of the Presentation Slides may be found here: [Timeliness of Child Care Payments Presentation Slides](#).

Director Schleck’s Headline Summary of the Report is “Although 95.5% of invoices in our sample were paid within 30 days, the underlying process leaves much to be desired, in terms of clarity, communication, and consistency of application. Simply put, the limitations noted by OPEGA create risk: risk of significant payment delays if and when matters stray off course.”

Director Schleck noted that OPEGA identified two fundamental issues within the process:

1. There is no single, established childcare invoice payment process among the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) district offices.
2. Communication between process participants (OCFS, Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS), child care providers, and resource parents) is often ineffective.

Director Schleck stated that to address the identified fundamental issues, OPEGA offers the following recommendations:

1. Establish a Standardized Process
2. Clarify and Communicate Current Invoice Requirements

Sen. Timberlake asked, after OCFS was notified that an invoice was overdue, how long did it take for that invoice to be paid.

Director Schleck stated that he would have to get back to Sen. Timberlake whether that was something OPEGA was able to answer within the review work performed.

Sen. Timberlake stated he would like to know the answer to that as he has heard a lot of complaints from those who were waiting for payments.

Sen. Timberlake asked about the sample OCFS Invoice Form in Appendix D of the Report, stating he is very concerned that there is a spot on the invoice for a social security number, and asked if that information is being collected.

Director Schleck stated that he hoped the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Operational Excellence (OpEx) group will take Sen. Timberlake's concern into consideration when leading a performance improvement project regarding the payment process.

Sen. Hickman asked how invoices from providers are saved in the payment process.

Matt Kruk, Principal Analyst in OPEGA, stated that documents in Docuware are PDFs and are indexed with some key information, adding that he did not find unique invoice identifiers.

Sen. Hickman asked if the PDF files were saved with a unique file name that could identify the invoice or even the date it was entered.

Mr. Kruk stated he did not have the answer to Sen. Hickman's question at this time.

Sen. Guerin asked how OCFS tracks invoices, including ones that may need to be corrected before being paid.

Mr. Kruk stated that tracking of invoices is an issue due to not having a unique identifier for each invoice. Mr. Kruk stated that he observed that providers would resend invoices to OCFS that have not yet been paid, and then OCFS would have to resubmit the invoice or try to figure out why the invoice has not been processed and let the provider know if there is a valid reason the invoice has not been processed.

Sen. Guerin asked what would prevent duplicate payments on invoices with the current system.

Mr. Kruk stated that the prevention of duplicate payments is picked up in the financial side of Katadhin, adding that for each entry the child's name, the provider's name, and the service dates are entered at this stage. Mr. Kruk stated that if duplicate service dates are entered the system will reject and flag that.

Rep. Stover asked if part of the process improvement would be to standardize the invoice form to a single form across the whole state and is there a reason why it could not be done.

Mr. Kruk stated that OpEx will now work with OCFS on the invoice process to determine what that process should look like. Mr. Kruk added that there may be a better process that OpEx can recommend such as a portal system, rather than working with paper invoices.

Sen. Farrin asked if invoices rejected at the district level, would be rejected in all districts.

Director Schleck stated that some districts do not review invoices at all before sending them on to the central office, while some districts will review invoices and communicate with providers that correction and resubmission is needed before sending the invoice on to the central office.

Rep. Mastraccio asked at what point in the invoice process, is a provider notified if an invoice needs to be corrected, or is a provider not notified, and they are just not paid.

Mr. Kruk stated that he does not believe OPEGA would have been able to note an absence of communication with a provider as they obtained data from emails and could just see back and forth communication when a provider did reach out that they had not been paid for an invoice.

Rep. Mastraccio asked, regarding providers interviewed by OPEGA during this review, if OPEGA noted differences in the invoice submission processes as reported by those providers, and if OPEGA noted if those differences affected the timeliness of payment received, for example if a provider submitted a paper invoice instead of email, did it take longer to receive payment.

Mr. Kruk stated that OPEGA's sample of invoices was during a three-month period, however OPEGA didn't necessarily talk to providers who billed during that three-month period and therefore cannot cross reference those two. Mr. Kruk stated that OPEGA asked for a list of childcare providers that had provided care for a child in state custody over a longer time period, and from that list OPEGA stratified a random sample of providers to interview.

Rep. Perkins asked, regarding page 18 of the report: Provider Suggestions for Improvement, how many of the providers interviewed noted that they would suggest a paperless process for submitting invoices.

Mr. Kruk stated that eight out of 16 providers interviewed suggested an on-line invoice process.

Rep. Lee asked if there was a specific employee at each district who was tasked with overseeing the provider invoice process.

Mr. Kruk stated that individuals responsible for the invoice process at each district varied between case aids and clerical assistants, adding that generally a person in the district office was assigned to receive all invoices, not just childcare invoices.

Rep. Lee asked if it was known what percentage of the individual's work was taken up with handling of invoices.

Mr. Kruk stated he would have to go back and look at the interview write-ups for each of those individuals to see if that information was collected.

Rep. Lee asked if it would make sense to centralize this whole process and have just a few people responsible for this work.

Sen. Hickman stated that Rep. Lee's question will certainly be part of the work session on this report.

Director Schleck stated that OPEGA's role is to evaluate the process and make recommendations for improvement, and Department Management's role is determining how to implement improvements.

Sen. Timberlake asked about Market Rate Exceptions, and how is it that different rates are paid across the state, and is each district being paid the same rate.

Mr. Kruk stated that OCFS developed a payment rate table which has child age, district or county, and facility type, for example looking at childcare rate for a five-year-old child who is in Machias the table would indicate that rate, adding that the childcare rate for a five-year-old child in Portland could be a different rate. Mr. Kruk stated the market rate is not determined by individual provider, but where the service is provided. Mr. Kruk stated that OPEGA noted a provider's rate could be higher than the OCFS Market Rate, adding that OCFS's central finance department described a process where a provider could seek approval for an exception to the Market Rate. Mr. Kruk noted that in talking to some individuals doing work in the district office, some employees were not aware that there could be exceptions to the Market Rate.

Sen. Hickman asked if the district office that was not aware of a specific invoice email address for invoices at every district was the same district that the central office instructed a provider to send invoices to the specific invoice email.

Mr. Kruk stated that he would have to look into Sen. Hickman's question to see if that answer is in the data.

Sen. Timberlake asked for the market rates throughout the state to be available to the Committee for the work session.

Rep. Perkins asked if the Committee could also be provided with information on how often those Market Rates are adjusted.

Sen. Hickman thanked Director Schleck for the work that OPEGA did to bring this report to the Committee.

Sen. Hickman next invited OCFS Director Bobbi Johnson to make any statement she would like in her response to this report and to take any questions from the Committee.

Director Johnson read the OCFS's response to the OPEGA Report into the record; this response can be found in Appendix E of the report.

Sen. Hickman asked the Committee Members if they had any questions for Director Johnson.

Rep. Perkins asked Director Johnson if she had a timeframe for implementing process improvements outlined in OCFS's response.

Director Johnson stated that she hopes by the end of 2026 the improvements will be fully implemented.

Sen. Hickman asked about the origin of the Operational Excellence (OpEx) group, and when and why was it established in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Director Johnson stated she did not have information about when and why OpEx was established, but she did say it was a team that was established within the Department, and offers green belt training on a regular basis, Lean Six Sigma training is provided to different members of the department staff as well as engaging in improvement projects within the department.

Sen. Hickman stated that he would like to know more about OpEx, including their origins, are they authorized in statute, and how they work within the Department.

Sen. Farrin asked Director Johnson if she was surprised by anything within the OPEGA Report, and what troubled Director Johnson the most going forward.

Director Johnson stated that in March of 2025 she did a presentation to this Committee as well as the Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee about payment processes for child care within child welfare and what she reported at that time, based on their analysis, was that 99% of completed invoices that were processed through the Katadhin system were paid within 15 days, and she was not surprised by the OPEGA Report. Director Johnson stated that during their inquiry for the payment data presented in March of 2025, they encountered some of the same issues that OPEGA encountered of being able to understand the different pathways invoices into their system and being able to track all of those invoices for timeliness of payment. Director Johnson also noted that there are invoice identifiers for those invoices received in the dedicated email address, and those invoice identifiers are the date the email was received in those email boxes, child information, provider information, and service information.

Sen. Farrin asked Director Johnson to ask OpEx a timeframe of implementation of these improvements and provide that for the work session.

Sen. Hickman asked Director Johnson if she knew how long it took the OpEx team to do the vendor code process improvement initiative.

Director Johnson stated she believes it was six to nine months from first engaging the OpEx team to the time that the recommendations were operational for the vendor code correction.

Rep. Mastraccio stated that she was amazed that the timely payment rate was so high based on the current invoice payment process, adding that those who are working in this process are probably working harder than they need to be.

Sen. Timberlake stated that a question that he would also like an answer for during the work session is why the Department wouldn't have one location and one group of employees who are responsible for the invoice process. Sen. Timberlake stated that he would also like at the work session a detailed timeline of the implementation of improvements to this process for the Committee. Sen. Timberlake also stated that he was also very concerned about the communication issues detailed in the Report and he would like to know the plan for this to be rectified.

Director Johnson stated that during the previous centralized payment pilot program a majority of the childcare invoices for children in state care were centralized, and one individual was assigned to that work. Director Johnson stated that this could be a recommendation that comes out of the work with OpEx.

Director Johnson stated she also had an answer to Sen. Timberlake's earlier question about unpaid invoices. Director Johnson stated that there were 78 unpaid invoices identified in OPEGA's report, which OPEGA sent to OCFS on December 16, 2025. The list of the unpaid invoices was sent to Business Services on January 2, 2026, Business Services reviewed that list and determined that all but one of those invoices had been paid, and the one invoice that was not paid required a fix which happened the week of January 26, 2026, adding that as of now, all of the 78 unpaid invoices have been paid.

Sen. Guerin asked Director Johnson, regarding the presentation Director Johnson made in March of 2025, if they had identified the inconsistencies in the invoice payment process as described in the OPEGA Report.

Director Johnson stated that in preparing for the presentation for March of 2025, they did identify that invoices for providers were not consistent across the state, adding that during that preparation they did not evaluate the process as deeply as OPEGA has done for this report.

Sen. Guerin stated that she was concerned that OCFS identified inconsistencies a year ago and did not make changes then and that recommendations in the Report will take another year to implement.

Director Johnson stated that OCFS also accepts invoices that providers have created for their own use, noting that OCFS is working on understanding the ability to work with providers to have them all transition to one invoice form.

Sen. Guerin asked if OCFS provides any information to providers about what should be included on invoice forms.

Director Johnson stated that she believes the district offices provide information to providers on what should be included on invoices, adding that this is where the variations of the invoices exist and how those invoices are received. Director Johnson stated that she agrees with Sen. Guerin in that it should not take nine months to standardize the invoice form for providers.

Rep. Perkins stated that the lack of a standardized process makes it difficult, and he was very surprised that the Report showed inconsistent processes between the different districts and asked Director Johnson if she was surprised by the findings in the Report showing the inconsistency between the districts or if she was aware of those inconsistencies prior to the Report being released.

Director Johnson stated that having been a program administrator in a district office, and responsible for some of the processes, she can understand how there can be some variance across districts. Director Johnson added that there are also similarities across the districts in how some things are managed as well. Director Johnson stated that she is committed to standardizing the provider payment process as well as other processes.

Rep. Lee asked about centralizing accounts receivable in the central office rather than having it be the responsibility of separate districts so that it is standardized and dedicated staff are handling this process.

Director Johnson stated that there had been a central office pilot program for a period of time with one individual handling about two-thirds of the state with coordinating, receiving invoices, and working with

providers. Director Johnson stated that this program was successful however they did not have the capacity to expand this program to cover all districts, or to continue the program after the pilot period was completed.

Rep. Lee stated he would like to hear more about the pilot program for the public hearing.

Rep. Lemelin stated he had two concerns, one being that there is no standard operating procedure within OCFS and why is that not already in place and asked Director Johnson why she is not having monthly meetings with the districts to review the standard operating procedures in order to make the Department function better. Rep. Lemelin stated his other concern is that there is no standardized invoicing especially given how large OCFS is. Rep. Lemelin stated that as Director Johnson stated that she had worked as a program administrator in a district and yet has not standardized the processes across the state is concerning to him. Rep. Lemelin stated that for the work session, he would like Director Johnson to come back and explain why inconsistencies have not already been standardized.

Director Johnson stated that despite the challenges noted in the Report, the childcare provider invoices have been paid timely at a very high percentage. Director Johnson stated that each district office has had their own processes for invoices and OCFS is taking a look at those processes and looking to standardize the process of invoices as well as other practices across the state. Director Johnson stated that she wants to ensure that OCFS staff has the tools, resources and skills to ensure the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children.

Sen. Guerin asked if the Market Rate payment for childcare services is a set chart, and if it can be provided if people request it.

Director Johnson stated that the Market Rate chart is available on the OCFS website. Director Johnson added that the rates that have been established is based on a survey of childcare providers that is done every three years, and that data is analyzed by the agency OCFS is contracted with to conduct the survey, adding that the last survey and analysis standardized all of the counties except for Sagadahoc, Cumberland, and York counties which have a higher Market Rate. Director Johnson added that OCFS also oversees the Child Care Affordability Program and have standardized the Market Rate to ensure that providers who have children in state care receive the same rate as providers in the Child Care Affordability Program. Director Johnson stated that there is a process for exceptions to the Market Rate.

Sen. Hickman asked Director Johnson if she was surprised to learn from the Report that some workers in OCFS do not believe there are exceptions to the Market Rate or that the Department does not pay late fees.

Director Johnson stated she was not surprised by the Report's findings, stated that the information around exceptions to the Market Rate and late fees was not communicated well to the districts, noting this is an area OCFS needs to improve and creating on-demand training will assist with this issue.

Sen. Hickman stated the next steps for the Committee on the OPEGA Report are the Public Hearing and Work Session, where the members may ask additional questions. Sen. Hickman thanked Director Johnson for working with OPEGA on this evaluation and for the Department being willing to receive the recommendations from OPEGA and work to improve the Department's processes.

Sen. Hickman put the Committee at ease at approximately 11:45am.

Further Consideration of Request of Senators Timberlake, Farrin, and Guerin for OPEGA Review of Aspects of Maine State Contracting, and Matters Relating to MaineCare Program Integrity

Sen. Hickman called the Committee back to order at approximately 12:28pm

Sen. Hickman turned to the next item on the agenda and invited OPEGA Director Schleck to join the Committee again in discussion as the Committee further considered what, if anything, they may wish to do in response to the request from Senators Timberlake, Farrin, and Guerin requesting OPEGA to review a number of items, including aspects of state contracting and matters relating to MaineCare Program Integrity.

Director Schleck shared an OPEGA Report from 2009, which may be found here: [MaineCare Durable Medical Equipment and Medical Supplies – Measures to Control Costs Need Strengthening](#)

Director Schleck stated that while the 2009 OPEGA Report was focused on durable medical equipment, it contains recommendations to “Strengthen the Program Integrity Unit’s capacity to monitor MaineCare claims” and “ensure communication and action on issues identified by the Program Integrity Unit”.

Director Schleck also pointed out page 9 of the report which stated the following: “OPEGA concluded that existing measures for preventing and detecting excessive, unnecessary or inappropriate claims need to be strengthened”. The 2009 Report also stated that OPEGA found “weaknesses in automated system edits and checks, lack of a process for routine analysis and identification of transactions that present risk for fraud or unnecessary expenditures, and lack of communication and coordination among DHHS units”. Director Schleck stated that these 2009 findings are relevant to the current Committee discussion on MaineCare program integrity.

Director Schleck stated that if the Committee decides to assign OPEGA work related to MaineCare program integrity, MaineCare is a \$5 billion program expenditure in the State, so he suggested that OPEGA could do a risk assessment of the PIU, including assessing the issues raised in the 2009 OPEGA Report, to provide a sort of report card of the current fitness and functioning of the office.

Director Schleck also referenced a 2015 Federal DHHS OIG report which was provided to the Committee at the last meeting. That report may be found here: [2015 OIG Report: Maine State Medicaid Fraud Control Unit](#)

Sen. Farrin stated that on page 22 of the 2015 OIG Report, is the Maine Attorney General’s response, concurring with the four recommendations made in the report. Sen. Farrin stated he would like to know if those recommendations have been implemented.

Director Schleck also pointed out page 8 of the 2015 OIG Report, which points out a concern of a low number of fraud referrals from the PIU and read from the report the following: “Typically, referrals from the PIU are an essential component of a Unit’s ability to effectively investigate and prosecute Medicaid provider fraud. The Unit director reported that he was concerned about the low number of referrals from the PIU. Staff turnover within the PIU and the time taken to revise the State Medicaid agency’s policies may have affected the PIU’s ability to provide referrals.”.

Rep. Perkins stated that the 2009 OPEGA Report showed, at that time, that there had not been a Surveillance and Utilization Review (SURS) since 1995, and that SURS was used to flag suspect transactions for suspect transactions and noted that SURS ceased function in 1995 due to a computer system failure. Rep. Perkins asked if a surveillance system has since been implemented by PIU.

Director Schleck stated that the 2009 Report does show issues about the history and conditions of the PIU as well as highlighting the fact that at that time the technology was not adequate and that there would be a new system. Director Schleck stated that if OPEGA conducts a Risk Assessment of the PIU, they can look at the infrastructure of that unit, including looking at staffing, analytics, current technology, referral rates, and challenges of the unit and provide the Committee with a high-level overview of any issues found and recommendations for improvement.

Rep. Mastraccio stated she is interested in seeing a review of PIU that goes back to 2009 to present to see what has happened over time.

Director Schleck stated that the Committee has in the past taken previous OPEGA Reports and followed up on the subject to see if processes were improved.

Rep. Mastraccio stated that when she was previously on the Committee, she remembers doing follow-ups on OPEGA Reports routinely and found it helpful, and the follow-ups also revealed that while technology rapidly changed, government typically responded to changes slower.

Rep. Perkins stated that technology always changes, and government will always be a little behind due to the way changes are approved and procured, however as technology gets better identifying patterns--whether errors, fraud or anomalies--these should not be happening, and should be easier to identify even if government is a year or two behind in technology. Rep. Perkins stated that he is very concerned that the State still has the inability to detect these problems, and does not believe the PIU, while willing to do their job, are somehow unable to do their job. Rep. Perkins stated that learning who knew what when will help identify where failures in PIU, and whether it is a system failure, leadership failure, training failure, or a resource failure.

Rep. Lemelin stated that he looks for common denominators, and in looking at the 2009 OPEGA Report there is lack of communication and coordination amongst DHHS units. Rep. Lemelin stated that every single report contains communication and coordination issues, and this is a big concern.

Director Schleck invited the Committee to look at page 11 of the 2009 OPEGA Report which states "OPEGA found that the Program Integrity Unit has, in the past, identified control and policy issues that are root causes for overpayments on DME claims, but no action had been taken to address them". Director Schleck stated that this does appear to be a common theme.

Sen. Hickman stated that the common theme seen in Reports, and in the OPEGA Report released today, is why the Committee would like to know; what the action plan is, what is the timeframe for implementing the recommendations.

Sen. Hickman also stated that the Committee should find an opportunity to review the work the Committee did on Child Protective Services documents in its Committee Report and follow up on the recommendations

made. That report may be found here: [GOC Report: Frontline Perspectives in Child Protection as Catalysts for Reform](#).

Sen Hickman stated that following up on the work this Committee does and getting the agencies to follow up on recommendations that are made by OPEGA is something this Committee should be more vigilant about, adding that the requests for reviews received by the Committee are often the same as previous concerns.

Director Schleck provided the Committee with an updated OPEGA Work Plan, which shows the order of the work presently assigned to OPEGA. That work plan may be found here: [Updated OPEGA Work Plan](#).

Director Schleck stated that OPEGA is about to begin field work stages of the reviews on the Seed Potato Certification Program and Juniper Ridge Landfill, adding that if the Committee would like a review on the PIU regarding MaineCare, or any other review, to be a priority, reordering the OPEGA Work Plan would require a two-thirds vote.

Sen. Hickman stated that the review on the Seed Potato Certification Program is important as the State has had two lawsuits filed against it involving this program, and clarification on the Program is needed. Sen. Hickman also stated that Juniper Ridge has had on-going concerns that need to be addressed. Sen. Hickman stated that he does not believe that the order of assigned OPEGA reviews should be changed.

Rep. Mastraccio stated that she also does not want to change the order of assigned OPEGA reviews, however she did ask if there was an ability to have an outside consultant to perform a data collection on the PIU concerns.

Director Schleck stated that as part of a Risk Assessment of PIU, OPEGA would also do a sampling of data to determine if PIU is functioning and noticing trends in the data as it should. Director Schleck added that as OPEGA is reviewing the information, they may determine they want to broaden the sampling, Director Schleck stated that there can be other issues in hiring consultants and would prefer that OPEGA does this particular work.

Sen. Farrin stated that he respects the Chair's opinions on the priorities of the OPEGA Work Plan, but that he has concerns and believes there should be some oversight by this Committee into the MaineCare program as it has implications for the taxpayers in Maine.

Sen. Hickman stated that the Committee has the ability to have conversations and to ask questions of the Program Integrity Unit about concerns the Committee has, adding that this could help the Committee develop the scope of work for an OPEGA review if the Committee votes to add this to the OPEGA Work Plan.

Sen Guerin asked Director Schleck for the timeline of the OPEGA reviews of Juniper Ridge and the Seed Potato Certification Program, and for an estimated start time of the Risk Assessment of the PIU.

Director Schleck stated that he anticipates, without running into complications, that the reviews of Juniper Ridge and the Seed Potato Certification Program could be completed by the end of 2026. Director Schleck

stated that if the Risk Assessment of PIU was assigned as a priority over those, he would expect to be able to report that back to the Committee by the end of 2026.

Rep. Stover asked Director Schleck, in looking at the OPEGA Report from 2009 and the OIG Report from 2015, if OPEGA would use those reports as a starting point for the Risk Assessment of PIU.

Director Schleck stated that the 2009 OPEGA Report and the 2015 OIG Report would be key parts among other parts of the Risk Assessment of PIU, adding that when conducting reviews, OPEGA routinely looks for any prior reviews and findings on a matter.

Rep. Stover asked Director Schleck if looking at the functionality and operations of PIU would also be part of an OPEGA Risk Assessment.

Director Schleck agreed, and that both of the previous reports highlighted some potential issues within PIU.

Rep. Stover asked the Chairs how the Committee will interact with the committee of jurisdiction (HHS) on this matter.

Sen. Hickman stated that committees of jurisdiction are always informed of this Committee's oversight work.

Rep. Perkins stated that Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has issued Maine a mandate, and that Maine could potentially lose some federal funding based on what CMS finds. Rep. Perkins stated he believes it is important to get control of this matter as quickly as possible and proceed with Sen. Hickman's suggestion of the Committee inviting PIU to appear to answer the Committee's questions. Rep. Perkins asked Director Schleck if during the Committee's conversations with PIU the Committee determines that it should be OPEGA's priority work, how would that affect the current work of OPEGA.

Director Schleck stated that OPEGA can always accommodate the Committee's direction, noting that when OPEGA is working with an agency and suddenly pauses that work to shift to another review, there are some practical issues in that once OPEGA goes back to work on a partially completed review some work may need to be done over.

Sen. Hickman stated that the Committee has also directed OPEGA to review 16 sole source non-competitive procurements which is also an important review that could lead to issues of non-compliance or potential fraud and asked Director Schleck where this review is on the order of the work plan.

Director Schleck stated the review of the 16 sole source non-competitive procurements is currently at the end of the list of assigned reviews. Director Schleck stated that he has consulted with the State Controller, who confirmed that the process of the Single Audit regarding findings, is that both the State Auditor and the Agency report their position on the findings to the cognizant audit agency. Director Schleck added that the timeline for the cognizant audit agency to issue a final decision on behalf of the federal government, which may sort out if the State Auditor or DAFS is correct, is still pending.

Rep. Mastraccio stated that she believes it is very important for OPEGA to complete the reviews on Juniper Ridge and the Seed Potato Certification Program for the 133rd Legislature noting that there could be many changes with the elections this year and it is important to complete these reviews.

Sen. Hickman stated that this Committee does meet year-round and can ask for permission to meet more than once a month during the interim in order to invite departments to come before the Committee to answer questions about the findings in the 2009 OPEGA Report, the 2015 OIG Report, and the most recent 2026 OIG Report.

Sen. Hickman asked for the will of the Committee on this matter.

Motion and Committee Vote

Sen. Farrin made a motion to add to OPEGA's Work Plan, a Risk Assessment of the Program Integrity Unit regarding MaineCare.

The motion was seconded by Rep. Perkins.

Following further discussion, the vote was taken.

The motion was unanimously approved by all members who voted. (Seven members were present for the vote, two members voted later by absentee as allowed by Committee Rules.)

Request of Senator Timberlake for OPEGA Case File Reviews of OCFS Involvement, If Any, With Two Additional Families Where There Was a Child Fatality

Sen. Hickman asked Director Schleck to read Sen. Timberlake's review request letter into the record as Sen. Timberlake was not present (due to a family emergency). That letter may be found here: [Request from Sen. Timberlake](#)

Director Schleck, after reading Sen. Timberlake's request in the record, and due to having current members who were not members of the Committee in February of 2025, provided the Committee with the memo from the Health and Human Services Committee dated February 20, 2025, regarding legislative oversight of the child welfare system. That memo may be found here: [Memo from HHS to GOC](#)

Director Schleck next provided some additional logistics about OCFS case file reviews for the Committee to consider. Director Schleck stated that the provision in Title 22 regarding child protection that when a parent or other person is charged with the death of a child, that action provides a later pathway for more information to be public, however, if an investigation of a child's death does not lead to charges, there are practical limits on how much information under current law that OPEGA can ever report publicly.

Director Schleck stated the Attorney General's expectation, as well as the Department's expectation, is that they be able to resolve the criminal matter, if individuals are charged, and any related child protection proceedings for surviving siblings. Director Schleck added that if the Committee votes to add the two additional case file reviews to OPEGA's Work Plan, OPEGA will need to wait for what happens criminally

and whether there are resolutions for other children, if any, who were also in the care of those charged with the crime.

Sen. Hickman stated that the request from Sen. Timberlake also was to expand the scope of a review already assigned to OPEGA, the Chelsea kinship placement case file review, and asked Director Schleck to explain why that matter may also take time for OPEGA to be able to do.

Director Schleck stated, regarding the Chelsea kinship placement case, the foster child is the one who allegedly committed the crime and at this moment it is still a juvenile matter. Director Schleck stated that given the age of the accused, and the nature of the crime, generally speaking one may expect the State to move to a bind over hearing where the accused can be tried as an adult. If the accused in this matter is tried as an adult it would allow more information, at some point, to become public. Director Schleck stated that there would still be some issues on how much information gathered could be reported to the Committee because the deaths in the case were not of a child in state custody per the Title 22 provision earlier referenced.

Rep. Stover stated that there are also two death review panels that also will review these cases, the Domestic Violence Homicide Review Panel and the Maine Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel. Rep. Stover stated the Domestic Violence Homicide Review Panel also cannot review the Chelsea case until the criminal case is adjudicated. Rep. Stover asked if there is an opportunity to talk to the panel chairs to see if they are going to look into these cases in the future.

Director Schleck stated that in Title 22 that there is also a provision for the Maine Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel which states their records may not be subpoenaed, so this suggests to the Director there may be practical limitations here for OPEGA.

Sen. Hickman stated that in the Committee's Report, *Frontline Perspectives in Child Protection as Catalysts for Reform*, the Committee did invite the Maine Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel to tell the Committee how they do their work. Sen. Hickman encouraged all Committee Members to read the Committee Report, adding that there is a lot of information in that report to review.

Sen. Farrin stated that in speaking with Sen. Timberlake about this request, and knowing that all members of the Committee want to do whatever they can to protect children, he realizes there are limitations of what the Committee can do while criminal proceedings are in process, however the intent is to keep these concerns in front of the Committee so that when access to information becomes available the Committee can act as quickly as possible.

Rep. Mastraccio stated that she believes this Committee should allow the HHS Committee to take the lead on legislative oversight of the child welfare system. Rep. Mastraccio also stated that the Committee directed OPEGA to do the previous individual case file reviews due to what was considered an emergency, however continuing look at individual cases is not what this Committee is designed to do, rather it is designed to look at the evaluation of programs. Rep. Mastraccio suggested sending a letter to the HHS Committee to share the concerns of this Committee and request updates. Rep. Mastraccio also suggested inviting Christine Alberi, Maine Child Welfare Ombudsman to come before this Committee to present her 2025 Annual Report.

Sen. Farrin stated that he understands Rep. Mastraccio's statements, however he believes that the reason that the requests for individual case file reviews is that, unfortunately, children are still dying in child protective services.

Rep. Mastraccio stated that she agrees with Sen. Farrin's statement but has a different way of viewing this matter. Rep. Mastraccio believes that more work needs to be done to help families in order to prevent children from being hurt or worse, adding that this is why she believes the legislative oversight needs to be with the HHS Committee.

Sen. Farrin stated that he understands Rep. Mastraccio's statements, however he believes the situations right now need to be addressed. Sen. Farrin also stated that he supports sending a letter to the HHS Committee but believes the role of this Committee is to ask hard questions that may otherwise not get asked.

Sen. Hickman stated that he respectfully received the letter from the HHS Committee. Sen. Hickman stated that in working on his bill, LD 127, he looked at the origins of this Committee and OPEGA, adding that one of the reasons this Committee was formed is due to the fact that committees of jurisdictions are too busy passing legislation to do oversight. Sen. Hickman stated that the HHS Committee does not perform oversight because it is too busy working on legislation. Sen. Hickman also stated that there have been many requests before this Committee since it was formed regarding DHHS, noting that it is a large agency with a large budget and that even the HHS Committee and this Committee together cannot do enough oversight on the agency.

Rep. Lemelin stated he agrees with Sen. Hickman and does not support sending a letter to the HHS Committee, of which he is a member. Rep. Lemelin stated that the HHS Committee has the largest number of bills of any committee to work through and does not have the ability to conduct oversight other than inviting agency leadership to present updates. Rep. Lemelin stated that he believes this Committee only needs to look into the Chelsea matter and believes that will show areas in OCFS that need to be improved.

Sen. Hickman stated he believes the Committee to review the Committee Report, *Frontline Perspectives in Child Protection as Catalysts for Reform* to see how this Committee may follow up on recommendations made in that report. Sen. Hickman stated that the previous four OPEGA case file reviews, the work done on the Committee Report, as well as all OPEGA Reports on child protection provide a rubric for suggesting or recommending improvements to the agency. Sen. Hickman added that he believes that issues of infrastructure, management, and consistency are well documented, and this Committee can continue to push the agency to address them and provide updates on improvements made.

Sen. Farrin stated that the Committee Report and the past OPEGA Reports on child protection are a good starting point for Committee work and will spend time reviewing those reports for Committee discussion. Sen. Farrin stated that ultimately there is not a magic solution to fix issues, but continuing to have the conversations and continuing to work on these concerns is currently the best option.

Rep. Stover stated that over her career she has worked directly and indirectly with the Department of Health and Human Services, at times working directly with children and doing family therapy. Rep. Stover stated that early on in her career there was a series of horrible child deaths and a minor who caused the death of his babysitter, all which made a lasting impression on her. Rep. Stover stated that though these types of deaths

happen, that does not mean it needs to be accepted. Rep. Stover stated that the Committee and the Legislature needs to continue to try to improve or create whatever systems that will protect children more.

Rep. Lemelin stated that the Committee has already voted to have OPEGA do a case file review of the Chelsea matter once the courts have processed the case. Rep. Lemelin stated that he believes that this case file review will reveal information about why these tragic cases continue to happen.

Sen. Hickman stated that no motion on Sen. Timberlake's request needs to be made at this time.

OPEGA Director's Report

Sen Hickman next asked Director Schleck to present any other matters for the Committee.

Director Schleck stated that the next Committee meeting, subject to the Chairs, will have the public hearing on the OPEGA Report presented today.

Director Schleck stated that now that the meeting summary from the previous Committee meeting is approved, he will draft a letter to the Transportation Committee as voted by the Committee, from the GOC Chairs.

Director Schleck stated that the OPEGA Tax Team will also present the completed 30-Day Limited Analysis Project requested by the Tax Committee as well as how that process went as it was the first one and so there will likely be interest in the feedback from the Tax Committee.

Director Schleck presented the Committee with updated bill tracking information on bills relevant to the Committee.

Sen. Hickman stated that the next Committee meeting is scheduled for March 13, 2026, noting that also happens to be the deadline for committees to report out bills, which could be challenging for some members, and the Committee may need to consider meeting on an alternative date. (the Chairs subsequently determined to cancel March 13 and hold the next GOC meeting on March 27).

Adjourn

With no further discussion, Sen. Hickman adjourned the Government Oversight Committee, without objection, at approximately 1:56 pm.