

Christine Alberi, Child Welfare Ombudsman
Committee on Health and Human Services
Child Welfare Quarterly Update
June 23, 2026

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Christine Alberi, and I am the Child Welfare Ombudsman for Maine, thank you for having me here today.

Today I have a brief update to give you about the new Office of the Child Advocate, LD 1893, soon to go into effect.

I recently learned from the governor's office that I will be taking on the role of Interim Child Advocate. Although the law will not go into effect yet, and the transition from the Ombudsman's office to the Child Advocate Office will not happen until October 1, I very much appreciate the Governor and her staff's willingness to take this step this early so that we can get a head start on planning.

We have been working with the Department of Administrative and Financial Services on how the new office will be set up so that hopefully there will be a smooth transition in the fall. The new law provides that the three existing staff members will transfer from the Ombudsman's office to the Office of the Child Advocate until the legislature has confirmed a Child Advocate by July 15, 2027.

This is a tight timeline. The interim Child Advocate is directed to implement a resource needs assessment and prepare an in-depth report of resource needs. The report must be submitted to the Health and Human Services Committee no later than February 15, 2027 in order to make any necessary adjustments.

The next step in creating the office is that the Advisory Committee is appointed by the relevant individuals no later than March 15, 2027. In addition to providing oversight and guidance for the new office, the Advisory Committee is tasked with providing three names to the Governor in order to appoint a Child Advocate for the five-year term, to be approved by the legislature next July.

I am very much looking forward to completing the needs assessment for the office. I do not know where this office will go yet or exactly what shape it will take—that will likely take years to fully develop—but I am very much looking forward to the chance to study more closely and advocate more clearly for children who have spent a significant amount of time interacting with child welfare, children's behavioral health, and juvenile justice. For example, to answer questions like, why didn't we protect this child sooner during her child welfare interactions? Why didn't she receive the mental health services she needed that could have prevented her eventual commitment to Long Creek? And, is Long Creek able to serve its unique population of children in a way that keeps them safe and rehabilitates them? We are fortunate that there are many individuals and organizations who have been studying the complexities of juvenile justice for years in this state, so there is already a wealth of knowledge that we can draw upon.

Finally, in the midst of this transition, it is my intention to continue the Ombudsman's work as much as possible and we will have a form of an Ombudsman's annual report that reflects the work we did this year completed in January.

Thank you for having me here today, and please let me know if you have any questions.

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