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**Testimony of
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Department of Health and Human Services**

**Director Todd A. Landry, Ed.D.
Office of Child and Family Services**

Before the Joint Standing Government Oversight Committee

Hearing Date: May 10, 2019

Commissioner Lambrew:

Good Morning Senator Chenette, Representative Mastraccio, and esteemed members of the Government Oversight Committee.

I want to thank you all for inviting me to return to meet with you today. Since we last met, the Mills' Administration has continued its work to promote child health, safety, and wellbeing within our state. Chief among those developments is the reconvening of the Children's Cabinet. The Children's Cabinet brings together the Commissioners of Education, Public Safety, Corrections, Labor, and Health and Human Services to make statewide improvements in the lives of Maine's children and their families. The Governor has appointed me chair of this group because the Department I oversee includes multiple programs that touch children and families. The Cabinet is focused on two primary goals. The first is creating a comprehensive early care and education system in Maine that targets children before they reach school age. The second goal of the Cabinet is to support vulnerable youth and their families.

I am particularly excited that the Governor has directed us to focus on those first, critical years of a child's development. We know that engaging, supporting, and nurturing infants and toddlers sets them up to learn, grow, and succeed in life. We also know that our state experienced a 25% increase in the rate of substantiated reports of abuse and neglect between 2017 and 2018. As such, we need to work to strengthen not just child welfare, but also the services available to prevent child abuse and neglect and adverse childhood experiences in the first place. To that end, my Department has been hard at work to comprehensively address the needs of families and children. This includes expanding MaineCare, improving training of child care workers, and tripling the work supplemental benefit for families transitioning to work. We have created the position of Chief Pediatrician of Maine within the Department to assist us in weaving together the child health-related work being done across our Department, the administration, and our State as a whole.

The Department is also intensely focused on preventing child deaths. We announced last month that, from January 1, 2014 to March 31, 2019, 45% of child deaths in Maine were related to unsafe sleep environments. Additionally, [33%](#) of child abuse victims in Maine have parents with

active drug abuse disorder as a risk factor and 18% have a parent with alcohol use disorders. We are targeting home visits by the newly reinvigorated Public Health Nursing Program to parents with young children as well as a history of substance use disorders to, among other things, educate them about safe sleep. My Department is also launching a public health and information campaign to bring attention to safe sleep guidelines in order to prevent these types of deaths in the future. We have additionally submitted an application for a federal funding opportunity that would improve the coordination of care for pregnant and postpartum women with opioid use disorder through MaineCare.”

Child wellbeing and health is our collective concern, and the programs that address health and wellbeing span multiple systems. I know that it will take time to thoughtfully and methodically build a sustainable system of care that seeks to prevent abuse, neglect, and other Adverse Childhood Experiences. In the meantime, we are aggressively assessing the changes and workforce needed in the child welfare system to support its climbing caseload.

One workforce challenge has been resolved since the last time I testified before this Committee. For more than two years, the Office of Child and Family Services has been without a permanent director. As such I am incredibly excited to introduce to you, Dr. Todd Landry, our new Director of OCFS. Todd has had a distinguished career serving children and families and he brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in the areas of child welfare, early intervention and prevention, and children’s behavioral health. Todd served three years as the director of Nebraska’s Division of Child and Family Services. Most recently, he was the chief executive officer of Lena Pope in Fort Worth, Texas, a nonprofit that serves children and families with an array of prevention and early intervention services. Todd also serves on several national boards, including the Child Welfare League of America. Todd has knowledge and experience that I know will benefit OCFS, the Department, and children and families throughout the State. Today marks the last day of Todd’s second week in this role. He’s already been to visit over half of OCFS’ District offices throughout the state and he’s on track to visit all offices before the end of his first month. But this visit to the Legislature has been high on his list of priorities as well as mine.

Director Landry:

Good Morning Senator Chenette, Representative Mastraccio, and esteemed members of the Government Oversight Committee.

Thank you for inviting me here today and for this opportunity to speak to you regarding OCFS’ efforts to date to address concerns raised during the system evaluations completed by OPEGA, the Child Welfare Ombudsman, and PCG; as well as about some of our longer-term plans to improve our system. I’ve spent time in my first two weeks meeting with OCFS staff (in Augusta, Lewiston, Houlton, and Rockland), reviewing reports, assessing with OCFS leadership and some of our stakeholders and partners where we are and how we got here. I can say with certainty that the staff of OCFS are completely dedicated to child and family safety and wellbeing. They are also committed to a methodical and thoughtful approach as we seek to improve our system. There are certainly areas we can address swiftly, but much of the change that is needed cannot be made overnight. The only way we will be successful in improving the system is by carefully considering things like the specific needs of our population, the culture of our workforce, and the way in which we can ensure changes are sustainable. As I have repeated over the past two weeks, we must act with urgency but not haste.

I know that the last time the Commissioner appeared before you, we were awaiting the outcome of a survey where OCFS staff provided feedback on their views regarding the numerous recommendations that had been developed as the result of systemic evaluations. I wanted to take this opportunity to provide you all with the results of that survey, which had staff look at each individual recommendation and rate it on a scale from high to low priority. The recommendations which received the most support included reviewing and standardizing caseload/workload ratios for our frontline staff as well as development of a tool that can be used over time to determine the need for reallocation or additional staff, reducing the need to duplicate documentation, determination of areas where support staff could complete work to free up caseworkers to do casework, clarity regarding parents' rights and children's rights, and training for other systems which interact with the child welfare system. To this end, we worked closely with the Health and Human Services committee to establish a requirement that we develop caseload standard recommendations in collaboration with frontline workers and with input from the work of PCG. Following the development of those recommendations, we will report annually to the Legislature on the staffing ratios within Child Welfare. LD 821 passed unanimously out of the Health and Human Services committee a few weeks ago and is on its way to the Governor's desk.

As we sought to address staff's clear concern about the need for efficiencies in their work, one of the Office's primary focuses in the last few months has been the development of the Request for Proposals for the new system to replace our dated MACWIS system. That RFP has been published and released and we are working together with our partners in contract management and procurement to expedite the process for reviewing proposals, awarding a contract, and negotiating and implementing that contract. We believe it is likely we will have a contract in place by mid-summer of this year. Part of that process is that the contractor selection must be reviewed and approved by the Federal Administration of Children Youth and Families. Based on my discussions with other child welfare directors in the New England region and the country, this is a fairly quick timeline for something of this magnitude and my staff and I are deeply appreciative of the efforts of staff throughout state government who have been or will be assisting us. Once a contract is in place, we can begin the work of developing a system and planning for a smooth transition. We recognize there is an immediate need to replace MACWIS, but also know that we cannot rush the development of the new system without sacrificing the quality and effectiveness of it. As we move forward with this project, I will be seeking to balance those competing demands to ensure we are good stewards of the state and federal funds granted for this project and create a system that will effectively and efficiently meet the needs of our organization for several years to come. MACWIS is a complex system that houses a large amount of information from throughout child welfare, and its replacement must meet all of these needs and more, which will require careful planning, designing, building, and testing. I can assure you that as we proceed with this process, we will seek to ensure that all stakeholders are informed of our progress and have the opportunity to weigh in, including the Legislature.

We also learned from the staff survey that our staff felt there were areas in which they lacked critical information in order to make well-informed decisions regarding child and family safety and wellbeing. As you know, the Office has implemented a Background Check Unit within OCFS' central office that completes Interstate Identification Index and Confidential State Bureau of Identification checks on individuals involved in our cases. That unit currently serves York and Cumberland counties, completing background checks on all adult case participants when a new assessment is initiated. Piloting the program in these two counties has been beneficial as we

learned these new systems and developed processes and procedures to ensure we meet the strict security and confidentiality requirements related to our access to this information. We have seen the benefits of having increased access to information in a number of cases and believe we are now ready to expand this program statewide.

One of the last pieces I wanted to touch on before you have the opportunity to ask questions is the importance of foster and kinship parents within our system. May is National Foster Care month. Foster parents and kinship families are, in many ways, the glue that holds our system together. They partner with our staff and provide care for the day-to-day physical, mental, and emotional needs of children in custody. They are a critical link in reducing the trauma associated with the removal of a child from his or her parents' custody. Over the past few months, the staff of OCFS have been carefully examining the licensing process, as well as the way in which we support our current foster parents and kinship families. We have renewed our commitment to increasing the percentage of homes licensed within 120 days. We want to thank the Health and Human Services committee that recently unanimously passed out of committee LD 1526 to remove the requirement of a Fire Marshal's inspection in order to license a foster home. I urge you to support this bill when it comes before the full Legislature, as we believe this will reduce barriers to fostering that currently exist while also ensuring the safety of children in our care by utilizing a health and safety review by our staff.

In addition, OCFS has added additional staff within licensing to accelerate the licensing process and increase the support provided to families. We are piloting the use of an online informational meeting format to make those initial foster parent meetings more accessible for individuals considering fostering. Our Resource Parent Care Team contractor is currently working with over 100 foster families statewide to provide in-home clinical support to foster parents. It is essential that whenever possible we provide the support necessary to ensure that foster parents feel they can safely and effectively care for the children we have placed with them. Continuity in placement improves outcomes for children in care and helps provide stability that children who enter care may have lacked previously. We are working to ensure this type of continuity by increasing the number of available foster homes so that children and foster parents can be matched appropriately and also by supporting foster parents as they struggle with the difficult, complex, and sometimes emotionally taxing task of parenting a foster child. I know in the last Government Oversight Committee hearing there was a question about foster parent reimbursement rates over time. I have attached a document showing the two changes in the rates that occurred since 2004.

I know that I am new to this state, but I am not new to the challenges that many child welfare organizations face across the country. As I mentioned earlier, I have invested time in these first few weeks in meeting with our frontline staff so they can get to know me, but more importantly so I can get to know them. I've received excellent and thought-provoking feedback. The one thing that has struck me most is that sometimes the solutions that seem logical, the ones that seem like "easy wins" are not always so straightforward. Hearing this has reinforced for me the need to be thoughtful and methodical in our approach to system improvement, while balancing the need for swift and effective action – again, acting with urgency but not haste. We must be planful and selective in our approach to change for our staff and provide sufficient support to ensure we have full buy-in so these improvements have long-term sustainability. To do this, we are working to involve staff from all levels of the organization in our system-improvement work,

we are also focused on gathering stakeholder input, particularly through the use of our citizen review panels and the Ombudsman’s Office.

The work of child welfare is among the most complex in state government, assessing child safety and family dynamics is difficult and taxing. Our staff experience secondary trauma on a daily basis and their personal safety is sometimes threatened. But what I can assure you is that despite all of this, the staff I have had the pleasure of meeting thus far are passionate about improving the safety, permanency, and wellbeing of children and families in Maine. Real and sustainable system changes are possible because of the dedication of these staff. I also recognize the need to ensure our constituents are aware of the work being done and the changes being made. OCFS has been providing regular public updates on current initiatives and will continue to do so. I believe that through collaboration, transparency, dedication, and hard work we will effect real and meaningful change within this organization and our state as a whole. I am excited about the opportunity to be a part of this work and appreciative of the work already completed or underway which will improve child and family safety and wellbeing, which includes the work of this body to support improvements to the system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I welcome your questions.

Rate of Foster Care Reimbursement 2004-Current

Level of Care	2004 - 2008	2008-2018	2018 to Current
Unlicensed	N/A	\$ 10.00	\$ 18.50
A	\$ 16.50	\$ 16.50	\$ 25.00
B	\$ 30.00	\$ 26.25	\$ 35.00
C	\$ 45.00	\$ 39.38	\$ 45.00
D	\$ 60.00	\$ 52.50	\$ 60.00
E	\$ 75.00	\$ 65.62	\$ 75.00
Medical	\$ 60.00	\$ 60.00	\$ 70.00