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October 8, 2020

Senator Geoff Gratwick, Chair
Representative Patty Hymanson, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: Report to the Health and Human Services Committee pursuant to PL 2019, Ch. 481 (LD 997) *An Act To Promote Social and Emotional Learning and Development for Young Children*

Dear Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

Due to some important updates on the implementation of this law, the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) is writing to apprise you of developments related to this law and submitting this report ahead of its legislative due date in January 2021.

LD 997 was passed in June 2019 during the First Regular Session of the 129th Legislature and became effective 90 days from the close of the First Session (September 17, 2019). The law involves the implementation, in five pilot sites, of an early childhood consultation program to provide support, guidance, and training to improve the professional skills of child care and elementary school staff working with children who have challenging behaviors that may put them at risk of learning difficulties or expulsion. The consultation program also involves efforts to support families and foster families of children who are experiencing challenging behaviors. LD 997 directed that the consultation program utilize trained consultants to provide low-cost or no-cost evidence-based strategies to reduce challenging behaviors and promote social-emotional growth, as well as connecting children and families to resources and supports to assist in child development and success.

OCFS' efforts to implement an early childhood consultation pilot program have involved hiring of staff, selection of the program's model, the process of developing and completing a request for proposals (RFP) for the service model selected, stakeholder engagement and other general implementation efforts. The program has come to be known as the Maine Early Childhood Consultation Program (MECCP).

In the fall of 2019, OCFS began work with Human Resources to draft a Functional Job Analysis (FJA) for two of the new positions allocated as part of LD 997. Hiring for these new positions has taken more time than planned due to unforeseen challenges. OCFS posted the Project Manager position in June 2020. Unfortunately, there were only two applicants. The position was re-posted to ensure hiring of an individual who had the qualifications and experience for successful program implementation. After the second posting, OCFS was able to hire a qualified

candidate, Amy Beaulieu, who began work in mid-August. Amy is an LCSW and has over fifteen years of clinical and program development experience. She has worked as a clinician in various child and family-focused settings, including home and community-based treatment, schools, and treatment foster care. Amy has training in Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation through the University of Maine and experience providing on-site consultation in schools and early learning settings. Beaulieu also has a background in project management as she previously worked with the Cutler Institute at the Muskie School of Public Service to coordinate projects on evidence-based practices in children's behavioral health.

Over the past year, OCFS has been collaborating with stakeholders to study and select a model for use in Maine. This included meetings in September 2019 with the Community Caring Collaborative, Maine Roads to Quality, and the Center for Excellence at Georgetown to discuss the national landscape and models being used across the nation. In December 2019, OCFS connected with the developers of Connecticut's Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP) model. Additionally, OCFS met with Colorado representatives to learn about models implemented in that state, and with New York to discuss their pilot of the Connecticut ECCP model. OCFS' efforts to research models led to a desire to pursue more information regarding the Connecticut ECCP model.

In the Spring of 2020, OCFS met with Dr. Walter Gilliam to discuss his evaluation of the Connecticut model, gather his recommendations towards implementing the model with fidelity, and discuss the possibility of an evaluation of the MECCP in the future. In March 2020, OCFS finalized its decision to pursue the Connecticut ECCP model for Maine as it is the only model that is considered evidence-based at this time. OCFS then met with the Office of MaineCare Services and Child Development Services to orient them to this model. In collaboration with MaineCare, OCFS has also researched if/how this type of consultation program is being funded through Medicaid nationally as this funding would provide significant federal match for these services. It was determined that Medicaid funds are not currently being accessed for this purpose. OCFS and MaineCare continue to collaborate on the possibility of utilizing Medicaid funding for the MECCP in the future.

The selection of the Connecticut ECCP Model resulted in two sole-source contracts to assist with implementation. The first with the developer of Connecticut's model and the second with the owner of the model to coordinate the purchase and associated technology and materials. The development of the RFP for this service was heavily dependent on efforts to select the model Maine wished to pursue. Simultaneous to the model selection efforts, OCFS was also gathering child welfare, child development services (CDS), and children's behavioral health services data in order to establish the pilot site locations. These efforts resulted in Cumberland, Androscoggin, Aroostook, Penobscot, and Kennebec counties being selected as the five pilot sites for MECCP. Once the model for the program was selected, OCFS worked with the ECCP experts (including the developer of the model) to draft an RFP for the service. A draft of the RFP was completed in May and OCFS has been collaborating closely with the Department's Division of Contract Management (DCM) in order to finalize and publish the RFP. Unfortunately, the RFP finalization process took much longer than anticipated as a result of contracting delays caused by a significant increase in contracts aimed at addressing COVID-19 needs. In August, the Department agreed on an ambitious 9/1/2020 contract start date, but that date has since been

pushed back to no sooner than 11/1/2020. OCFS continues to work diligently with DCM and push for the soonest possible start date.

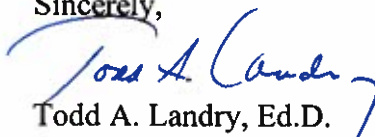
Other efforts related to implementation of the MECCP have been ongoing since the fall of 2019. These include the Department's collaboration with the Department of Education to draft and submit the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) application (unfortunately Maine was not awarded the grant), the shifting of Mental Health Block Grant and Child Care Development Block Grant funding (over what was allocated as part of the passage of LD 997) to fund the purchase of the evidence-based model and implementation of the five pilot sites, the development of an implementation action plan and regular meetings to monitor progress, and continued meetings with a small group of early childhood education stakeholders to orient them to the Connecticut model.

In the last month, OCFS worked collaboratively with the Maine Department of Education to discuss possible grant funding for the expansion of the MECCP beyond the five pilot sites. Although the RFP is still in progress, OCFS has begun working with Maine Roads to Quality and the model developer and owner to plan for implementation (including the referral process, training, integration into the early childhood education system, etc.). The hope is to have the MECCP up and running as soon as possible after the contract is awarded and these simultaneous efforts have been pursued with that goal in mind.

In the coming months, OCFS anticipates completing the RFP process, awarding a contract, and monitoring the hiring of each pilot site's consultant by the Awarded Bidder. OCFS has developed a plan to hasten implementation by engaging with Head Start providers. OCFS' goal is to have all consultants hired and trained (in-person) on the ECCP model by the end of December 2020. Due to delays in the procurement process and other delays related to the State's response to COVID-19, this date is later than anticipated, but OCFS continues to do everything possible to prepare for implementation and ensure MECCP can be up and running as soon as possible after the contract is awarded.

OCFS' efforts towards implementation of the MECCP have been extensive. The selection of the model took careful consideration and exploration, as well as the navigation of national and local relationships, including input from stakeholders whose buy-in is critically important to the success of these pilots. This pioneering program takes a great deal of effort to implement in a manner that ensures successful outcomes for children, families, and providers. OCFS remains committed to implementation of a successful pilot that may ultimately lead to Maine being the first state in the nation to implement an early childhood consultation program statewide.

Sincerely,



Todd A. Landry, Ed.D.

Director, Office of Child and Family Services