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LD 258

My name is Sophia Spiller and I am a Child Protective Caseworker out of District Three and have been with the Department for almost five years.

I am testifying for myself but also on behalf of all of my colleagues who do not feel heard. Funding is a major issue in the work that we do. We do not have any preventative resources available due to a lack of funding, particularly for mental and behavioral health services, and this leads to an influx of reports. Once reports are received, cases are dragged on due to having long wait lists for providers, leaving cases to pile up.

The biggest issue with funding is that we are not paid enough. It is disheartening that as an individual who serves arguably Maine's most vulnerable population, that I could go down the street to Target and only make a dollar an hour or two less.

This is not a normal social work job. I have had my life threatened, I've been spit at, almost hit by a vehicle driven by an angry client, and I am verbally abused and harassed on a regular basis. We have such high turnover in this job because nobody wants to be treated this way and get paid peanuts. It's time that our pay reflects the incredibly challenging work that we do.

As Caseworkers we are now responsible for not only our high workload, but clerical and case aid tasks as well. They are not paid enough which also results in turnover and adds unrealistic expectations to Caseworker's workload.

With all of this turnover due to funding, the job has become impossible. To break it down, I have 16 cases when the federal recommendation for a caseload is 12. I've never been under 14 in the five years I've been here. I have to see 87 people once a month. The time it takes to travel and visit with them is 83 hours. The time it takes to document all those contacts is 29 hours. That adds up to 112 hours of work, just to do the bare minimum; see people and document it. There are 160 working hours in a month. It's impossible to meet the expectations of the State when we are this overworked. Higher caseloads do not equal safer children. In fact, it will do the opposite.

We cannot wait for change to happen. It needs to be now.