

Testimony of Kelly M. Dell'Aquila
In support of
LD 1229: An Act to Support Peer Mentors for Parents Involved in the Child Protective Services System
April 21, 2023

Good Morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Kelly Dell'Aquila. I work for The Opportunity Alliance, a community action agency in Cumberland County that provides advocacy, leadership, and support to help individuals, families, and communities in Maine. I serve as a Family Education and Support Coordinator providing Family Centered Coaching, Parenting Education and Coordinator of ***Child Protective Services 101: For Parents, By Parents.***

Today, I am offering support for **LD 1229: An Act to Support Peer Mentors for Parents Involved in the Child Protective Services System** which includes continuation and expansion of ***CPS 101*** informational sessions.

In the Fall of 2021, The Opportunity Alliance, in collaboration with the Maine Justice for Children Task Force, developed free, virtual informational sessions for parents involved in Maine's Child Protective Courts. ***CPS 101*** provides:

- An introduction to Child Protective Service professionals including a caseworker, parent attorney, guardian ad litem, assistant attorney general and judge.
- Explanation of the court process.
- Tips for how to successfully engage in the process.
- Contact information for helpful resources.

The goal of ***CPS 101*** is to engage parents by providing helpful information as facilitated by parents who have experienced child protective services or navigated multiple complex systems.

CPS 101 is modeled, in part, after Dependency 101 of Children's Home Society of Washington (CHSW) in Washington State. ***CPS 101*** staff consulted with CHSW for technical assistance with the implementation of the virtual parent informational sessions. Consultation has included such things as training, curriculum enhancement, evaluation tools and delivery of a virtual platform.

The model of ***CPS 101*** compliments feedback from parent surveys administered in 2019 and 2021 by the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel. In both survey results, parents have identified needing more communication, knowledge of their rights and clarity with expectations about the child protective process.

CPS 101 outcomes (from pre and post survey data) from seventy parent participants reflects an increase in understanding of how the child protective system works, an understanding of who is on the child

protective team and what they each do, an increased understanding of what a parent needs to do to reunify with their family and an increased feeling of hope.

Additional parent feedback focuses on three major themes that parents identified as helpful after participating in the **CPS 101** informational sessions.

- Learning about the process
- Understanding the roles of providers
- Hearing stories from other parents

An unexpected need surfaced at the earliest stages of offering **CPS 101** from providers who also wanted to learn about the process of Child Protective Services and how to best support parents and families through their experience. To date, parent facilitators have served a total of 660 providers including OCFS staff, community service professionals and judicial branch members.

The additional funding in this bill, based on feedback from parents and providers would include expanded outreach to parents and providers, development of monthly parent workshops and 1:1 peer parent support.

In closing, I would like to thank the Maine Justice for Children Task Force, the Courts and the Office of Child and Family Services for their partnership with developing informational videos for parents explaining their roles in the reunification process with families.

Humbly, I thank the parent facilitators of **Child Protective Services 101: For Parents, By Parents** for sharing their lived expertise with the design, development, and delivery of **CPS 101** and for sharing their personal experiences and examples of hope for other parents throughout the State of Maine.

Thank you for your review and consideration of this important legislation. I would like to leave you with this quote that a parent shared about what they learned after attending **CPS 101**: "Being able to understand the process and what everyone is doing. Even if I am in the dark, there are resources who can shed light through, just as this class has."

Respectfully Submitted,

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