

Susan Longley

LD 779

To Co-Chairs, Sen. Baldacci and Rep. Meyer, along with each and every important member of this Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Susan Longley. I testify as one who has served in the Legislature and also as one who has served as a former co-chair of your Health & Human Services Committee.

Sadly, also during those years, the Department of Health and Human Services lacked the ability to focus well on children's needs, and, specifically, these failures also resulted in the tragic death of a 5 year old named Logan Marr. (For those of you who can handle this reminder, Logan Marr died when the foster parent opted to silence Logan by duct-taping her mouth so tightly to stop her from crying that she could not breathe. Not only that, but she chose to duct-tape this child to a chair in the basement so that she could not be heard or seen or saved.

As you and we all are painfully aware, Logan is just one of a child tragedies for which our DHHS can be held responsible.

As you also are aware, DHHS remains responsible for much more than just very important -and numerous - children's needs. As just one example, DHHS also is responsible for very important - and also numerous - elderly needs.

If I may jump ahead to my post-Legislative years, I am here today because I have had the chance to learn in family court about child-centered systems and how a child-centered department would be such a better way to help children and families.

With your support for establishing a single-focused Department of Children and Families, you essentially will be coordinating Maine's childhood professionals. You will be organizing the childhood professionals under one roof. In so doing, you will be increasing the odds that these childhood professional insure the use of successful, evidence-based practices. In this process, you will be increasing the odds that a more focused, more professional department will prevent the un-professionalism that has to be contributing to the too many preventable, Logan Marr-ish tragedies.

In short, I ask for your strong support out of your Committee for a Department of Child and Family Services as our best hope for finding ways to provide long-overdue help for Maine's children and families.

Thank you each very much for your time and attention and hard work.

Respectfully,

Susan W. Longley

PS. Should you like me also to attend your work session - and if I may digress from this very serious discussion - I promise not only to attend in person but also to bring the required treats as a returning member.