

Janet T. Mills  
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.  
Commissioner



Maine Department of Health and Human Services  
Child and Family Services  
11 State House Station  
2 Anthony Avenue  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011  
Tel.: (207) 624-7900; Toll Free: (877) 680-5866  
TTY: Dial 711 (Maine Relay); Fax: (207) 287-5282

January 16, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Chair  
Representative Meyer, Chair  
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 857 – *Resolve, To Establish a Process to Evaluate the Family Team Meeting Model*

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on LD 857, *Resolve, To Establish a Process to Evaluate the Family Team Meeting Model*. The Department is neither for nor against this proposal.

This bill, as proposed to be amended by a sponsor's amendment circulated to interested parties on January 4, 2024, would require the Office of Child and Family Services to contract with an independent entity to develop a system to evaluate the Family Team Meeting (FTM) model as currently outlined in OCFS' policy with a report due no later than June 30, 2025.

OCFS is aware that there are concerns about the consistency and quality of Family Team Meeting practice between Districts and even different staff and supervisory units. We agree that FTMs are a critical part of the process of a child protective case and appreciate the support this bill would provide in terms of potential to improve practice.

It is important that, should this bill move forward, appropriate resources are allocated to create the system for ongoing data collection and analysis referenced in Sec 1, paragraph 1. It is important that changes to FTM or the analysis of them requires minimal additional work by OCFS field staff. These staff have recently voiced significant concerns about the impact that evaluation and reviews have on their workload. Without robust support for data collection and analysis beyond current capacity, this evaluation work is likely to increase this burden, putting additional stress on staff.

We appreciate the sponsor's intent to improve FTMs, and ideally the experience of and outcomes for children and families. Similarly, OCFS has been actively exploring other options to increase the consistency and quality of FTMs statewide, while being mindful of field staff workload. As internal initiatives are developed and implemented, we will keep this Committee and the Legislature updated through the quarterly reports.

Finally, for consideration, the Committee may want to adjust the report date in the proposed amendment. Funding, if appropriated, may not be available for months following this Committee's action and then OCFS will need to work with state procurement to put out a request for proposals (RFP) and secure a contract. Once a contractor is selected, June of 2025 may not be far enough away to provide for the necessary time to complete the work.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on LD 857. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW  
Acting Director  
Office of Child and Family Services