

Testimony of Melissa Hackett

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In support of LD 857, An Act to Improve Family Team Meetings in Child Welfare Cases to Ensure Better Outcomes for Children by Providing Adequate Funding

Health and Human Services Committee

January 15, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett, and I serve as the coordinator for the Maine Child Welfare Action Network. I am here today on their behalf to testify in support of this legislation.

One of the Network's priority issue areas in child welfare system improvement efforts is cross-system collaboration. For several years now, we have made recommendations related to improving Family Team Meeting (FTM) practice. We are also aware that the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel has been hearing concerns about FTM practice, and has been considering the best means of addressing them.

FTMs are critical infrastructure for cross-system collaboration in the child welfare system, providing a format for parents, community providers, and caseworkers to meet, discuss, and problem solve around child protective cases. It becomes an important space for everyone to share information, develop plans and agreements to address concerns, and move families through the case process. When this type of team decision making is used at critical case points, studies have shown that caseworkers are better informed about the child and family, and children experience better outcomes.¹

Since the FTM model was first implemented in Maine in 2002, there have been revisions to policy and practice to incorporate best practice standards. As noted in their response to the 2023 MCWAP report, OCFS has recognized that due to implementation challenges and the increase in new staff, FTM practice has been inconsistent statewide.²

Given the importance of the FTM model in child protective cases, and the need for consistent and robust practice, the Network strongly supports this legislation to evaluate FTM practice in the state and to develop a continuous quality improvement process to ensure its effectiveness.

Thank you.

¹ <https://www.childtrends.org/project/team-decision-making>
<https://www.aecf.org/blog/team-decision-making-a-better-way-to-assess-child-safety>

² Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel, 2022 Annual Report https://www.mecitizenreviewpanels.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MCWAPAnnualReport2022_Final_1.27.2023.pdf