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Testimony of Rep. Amy Roeder sponsoring

LD 2078, An Act to Increase Participation by the Department of Health and Human Services Regarding Federal Benefits for Which Children in the Custody of the Department Are Eligible

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Amy Roeder, and I represent House District 23, which includes a portion of Bangor. I am the proud sponsor of **LD 2078, An Act to Increase Participation by the Department of Health and Human Services Regarding Federal Benefits for Which Children in the Custody of the Department Are Eligible**.

This bill requires the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to determine whether a child in their custody is eligible for benefits administered by the Social Security Administration or the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and apply for the federal benefits administered by those departments on behalf of the child. Additionally, LD 2078 requires DHHS to provide training to foster care children, department staff and representative payees who receive the federal benefit on behalf of a child.

According to a [federal report](#) prepared to address questions regarding children in the U.S. foster care system and their Social Security Benefits, about 27,000 children in foster care receive benefits from the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program due to their own disability or based on the retirement, disability, or death of an insured parent each year. In more than 80% of these cases, the Social Security Administration appoints the state child welfare agency as the child's representative payee to receive and manage the SSI/Social Security benefits on the child's behalf.

My son experienced this same issue when he didn't receive any of the death benefits he was entitled to when his birth father passed away. It was only when he turned nine, when we adopted him, that he began receiving his benefits, which means the state kept that money to offset his care for six or seven years.

This practice may also cause foster children to miss opportunities to accumulate savings in the future, lead to a lack of meaningful engagement and shared decision-making related to the

application and utilization of funds received on a young person's behalf and parity concerns, given that the state pays for the cost of care for young people who do not have these benefits.

Additionally, LD 2078 would provide better education to young Mainers in the foster care system regarding financial literacy training and support, which would help them to navigate benefits when they age-out of the system.

According to a 2013 report published by the United States Social Security Administration Office, youth who leave foster care without permanent homes, typically at age 18, often have difficulty securing housing and income sufficient to shelter and support themselves. Among youth who had been in foster care at age 17, a quarter reported being homeless and one-third reported receiving public benefits, including nutritional assistance or housing assistance, by age 19.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.