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Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Dr. Joe Anderson, and I'm a pediatric hospitalist and the Advocacy Chair of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (Maine AAP). We are a membership organization of 300 pediatricians and subspecialists across the state who are dedicated to protecting and promoting the health of infants, children, and adolescents in Maine.

After listening to the testimonies shared during the public hearing on LD 156, An Act to Improve Notifications Related to Substance-exposed Infants, we would like to share some thoughts and recommendations on how to proceed.

First, we understand the intent of this bill is to clarify the role of providers and the notification process when an infant is born substance-exposed, and we acknowledge that the Department of Health and Human Services shares our goal of ensuring that substance-exposed newborns receive the care they need and are able to grow up safe and healthy. However, we share many of the same concerns expressed by opponents of this bill during the public hearing.

We are primarily concerned that the changes proposed by the Department could harm the relationship between providers and patients. Specifically, we fear the changes may discourage birth parents from being forthright with their healthcare team about prenatal substance exposure(s), and could deter pregnant people from seeking the care they need out of fear of punitive measures, even if they are taking prescribed, legal medications. We also share concerns around how the proposed changes will move clinical decision-making power from the providers to the Department, who will ultimately decide if the newborn is affected by illegal or legal substances. We believe that this decision is best left to trained medical professionals, and not Department staff.

We appreciate the willingness of the Department to work with stakeholders to address our concerns. We recommend convening a group of stakeholders to address concerns surrounding the proposed changes instead of proceeding with the bill as written. If the Committee decides to convene this stakeholder group, the Maine AAP requests to participate.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have (Joeanderson207@gmail.com). You can also contact our lobbyist, Charlotte Warren of Moose Ridge Associates.

Joe Anderson, DO
Advocacy Chair, Maine AAP