

Testimony of Melissa Hackett
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LD 210, "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund
and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain
Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the
Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027"
February 24, 2025

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the committee. My name is Melissa Hackett, and I serve as the Coordinator for the Maine Child Welfare Action Network, a group of organizations and individuals who take collective action to support child safety and family well-being in Maine.

In recent years, the Legislature and Administration have made significant investments to shore up Maine's child protective agency, including pay increases and additional caseworker and staff support lines. This has been a critical investment at a time of significant strain on the agency, to better ensure effectiveness in intervening when families are in crisis and children are unsafe. We support allocations in this budget that provide ongoing and sustained robust investment in this essential part of Maine's child welfare system. And our efforts to ensure child safety and family well-being will be incredibly limited if we don't similarly invest and sustain investment in what works to keep children safe and prevent the need for state child protective agency intervention. If you are not already aware, DHHS and MCWAN recently released a statewide [Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan](#) that articulates this framework for keeping children safe by keeping families strong.

Children live in families, and families are complex. The challenges they face that far too often lead them to child protective involvement are also complex. Yet, we are fortunate to have a strong body of research and the perspectives of parents and caregivers that point to what works to prevent family crisis and the need for child protective involvement – which is traumatic and costly for families and for our state. This means ensuring families have economic security, and access to concrete supports like child care, food, health care, and housing. In Maine, risk factors for child removal include neglect, parental substance use, unmet mental health needs, and exposure to domestic violence. Ensuring access to services that address these challenges is also essential to support parents in their ability to provide safety and stability for their children. In short, it means families being able to get the help they need, when they need it, where they are – and without judgement.

Many of these supports and services are facing flat or decreased investment in this budget. Now is one of those specific moments in time – particularly with looming disastrous cuts on the federal horizon – for us to ask ourselves what our commitment is

to Maine children and their families. They deserve our steadfast commitment to ensuring their well-being today and a brighter future for tomorrow. That means investing in their families. We urge this committee and your colleagues to carefully consider proposed cuts, and to consider proposals that will raise revenue fairly to ensure a shared responsibility for sustaining the critical supports and services Maine children and their families rely on for their health, safety, and well-being. Now is not the time to go backward. Together, we can follow through on our commitment to Maine children and families today and ensure a stronger future for our state. Thank you.