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*Testimony of Rep. Michele Meyer in opposition to*  
**LD 592, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Crime of**  
**Endangering the Welfare of a Child**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety*

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and esteemed members of this committee, I am Rep. Michele Meyer, serving southern Maine's House District 150, all of Eliot and parts of Kittery and South Berwick. I stand before you in opposition to LD 592.

As a mother, as a grandmother, a domestic violence survivor and as the House Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee, I care deeply about the safety and well-being of Maine children.

I am also proud of my continued support of Maine's statewide Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan, which articulates a framework for keeping children safe by keeping families strong. I am providing testimony in opposition to LD 592 for several reasons. To prevent children from being in unsafe situations, we need to direct significant public and policymaking attention to efforts that research and evidence show work to prevent child abuse and neglect from happening. This means addressing the underlying conditions that can lead to abuse and neglect, including providing economic and concrete supports to families in times of need, and ensuring supportive services are available to address parental substance use disorder, mental health concerns, and exposure to domestic violence.

This proposal seeks to increase the punishment for parents in situations where children are found to be unsafe. While there are many child welfare advisory entities in Maine that provide regular recommendations to improve our child welfare system, NO recommendation has been offered that further criminalizing parental neglect would improve child safety. Instead of a criminal justice response, what is most appropriate

(and happens already) is for our state's child welfare agency to intervene and work with parents in these situations to ensure children are safe and to do everything possible to put supports in place that prevent the separation of children from their families.

Families are under significant stress right now, often facing complex and layered challenges. Many are afraid to ask for help for fear of an intervention by the state's child welfare agency. This is especially true for women who are survivors of domestic violence and pregnant or parenting mothers with SUD. Fear of losing a child or being further punished will make it even less likely parents will feel they can reach out for help when they need it. This makes children less safe.

To keep Maine children safe, we need to turn our collective attention to proven strategies to strengthen families, prevent the conditions for child abuse and neglect to occur, fund and strengthen our Domestic Violence Resource Center network and intervene with supports to mitigate harm when children are unsafe.

This policy proposal offers no such pathway. I urge you to vote ought not to pass. Thank you.