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March 27, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Chair
Representative Meyer, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 802 – *Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Design a Mentoring Program for Youth Who Have Extended Care and Support Agreements with the Department*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide information neither for nor against LD 802, *Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Design a Mentoring Program for Youth Who Have Extended Care and Support Agreements with the Department*.

This bill would require OCFS to contract with an independent provider to design a mentoring program for youth who have voluntary extended care and support agreements with the Department. This contract would include researching evidence-based mentoring programs, recommended training requirements for participants, and data collection and analysis. The input of youth currently or formerly in the extended care program would be required. The results of this contract would be shared in a report to this Committee in January of 2027.

OCFS strongly supports efforts to provide the best possible assistance to youth engaged in the Voluntary Extended Care Program (previously known as V-9) and already has initiatives in place to help do this. OCFS employs specialized, dedicated youth transition workers in each District. These staff provide specialized support and individual assistance to youth. They focus on the unique needs of youth who have aged out of care and assure that they have the assistance they need to thrive.

Beginning at age 14, OCFS' youth transition staff work with youth and their team to help prepare them for adulthood. This includes reviewing their credit reports and helping to address errors and fraudulent information on those reports, encouraging them to participate in Maine's Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT), providing financial support for learning to drive, encouraging them to engage in opportunities to build financial literacy through trainings and financial incentives for savings, planning for adulthood, and supporting them to develop essential life skills.

Youth who age out of the Department's care at 18 are eligible to participate in the Voluntary Extended Care Program until their 23rd birthday. This Program provides additional financial

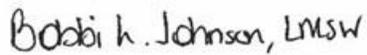
and other support as youth transition to adulthood. All youth who age out of care are eligible for MaineCare until their 26th birthday, tuition waivers from the University of Maine system, and transitional living support through a partnership between OCFS, MaineHousing, and local housing authorities across the state.

OCFS believes strongly that continuous improvement of the public and private systems of support for youth in care of all ages is a vitally important component of the child welfare system. We look forward to the Committee's discussion of this bill and the prioritization of support for youth involved in the Voluntary Extended Care Program.

OCFS appreciates the opportunity to provide this information on LD 802.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW
Director
Office of Child and Family Services
Maine Department of Health and Human Services