



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep. Lynn Holland Copeland in support of

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
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Lynn Holland Copeland, and I am proud to represent House District 130, which is a part of Saco. I am here today to testify in favor of **LD 802, a Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services (“DHHS”) to Design a Mentoring Program for Youth Who Have Extended Care and Support Agreements with the Department.**

I was a therapeutic level foster care parent for eleven years but stopped taking in foster kids during the pandemic. Kids and young adults in foster care often have been traumatized in the most egregious ways by their biological parents who ultimately were unable to parent their children. Their children end up being placed in foster care – as a ward of the State. Each and every child deserves a happy and healthy childhood, making friends, playing, learning life skills and becoming productive members of our society. All children are precious and need nurturing care.

From interactions with foster kids throughout my lifetime (having had an amazing foster brother in my family, before I was born!) I learned the kiddos remember, with video-like clarity, the moment they were removed from their biological family. Those images stay with them throughout their adult lives.

Since the kiddos likely have been abused, neglected or traumatized, or all of the above, they may have trouble transitioning into a new foster family and new environment. When foster kids leave their biological or foster homes, most times they take little with them, oftentimes in a bag or small backpack. Imagine growing up and not having photos of your family, having nothing familiar around you and trying to fit into a new family, a new bed, new siblings, new pets, new clothing, new neighborhood and new classmates. They very possibly are the “new kid” midyear in a new school. It’s pretty scary.

As they grow, there are other obstacles facing them. Feelings of not fitting in. Being the one alone at the cafeteria table. Missing family traditions, playing with pets or cousins and other familiar interactions.

Most of us fortunate enough to have our own biological children keep in touch with them forever. Many of our kids live at home with parental healthcare insurance until they are 26. Foster kids may well be on their own at the age of 18 when foster kids “graduate” from foster care.

What do you call a kid aging out of foster care? Quite possibly homeless. Depending on the relationship with their last foster family, they may be out on their own without a family. Imagine not having a family to enjoy Thanksgiving dinner with, share birthday cake, send them to summer camp or drop them off for college then welcome them back during school breaks or the next summer.

Foster parents and kiddos do the best they can with the support of DHHS. For those kiddos who really need it, DHHS enters into Extended Care and Support Agreements. With those Agreements in place, kiddos are supported by extended physical and mental healthcare, educational opportunities and further support.

This bill helps foster kids have a supported peer program with others who are similarly situated. We must support these traumatized and vulnerable youth so they can grow up to be productive Mainers in our communities.

In support of our youth and communities, I urge this committee to vote unanimously in favor of LD 802. It’s the least we can do, and we must.

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