

Senator Ingwersen and Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee name is Huyanna Clearwater, and I live in Augusta, Maine. I attend York County Community College and am in their EMT training program. I am also a member of Maine's Youth Leadership Advisory Team, a dynamic group of young leaders and adult partners working together to improve outcomes for youth in foster care. I am here today in support of LD 802, the 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. I believe that providing youth in care with additional support with mentors is a great step in more connections to the community and community opportunities. For several years, youth across the state have said that they wish they had someone they could talk to for advice or help in navigating foster care and thinking about the transition to young adulthood, other than their caseworker and other paid professionals. There are so many great organizations that have fully functioning mentoring programs that have been around for years. I remember growing up and having a strong relationship with a mentor through Big Brothers and Big Sisters and their college roommates as well. They taught me so much and took the time to just listen to me and share space with me. To this day I still talk with one of them and am really thankful for their continued support. Therefore, I encourage your support in LD 802 so that more young people in care might have access to a mentoring relationship with someone who is not paid to be part of their life and is a lifelong cheerleader.