

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Sara Gagné-Holmes
Commissioner



Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Child and Family Services
11 State House Station
2 Anthony Avenue
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011
Tel.: (207) 624-7900; Toll Free: (877) 680-5866
TTY: Dial 711 (Maine Relay); Fax: (207) 287-5282

4/28/2025

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 1459 – *An Act to Make General Assistance Officers Mandated Reporters*

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 1459, *An Act to Make General Assistance Officers Mandated Reporters*.

This bill would make municipal administrators of the General Assistance program mandated reporters in the event that an administrator suspects abuse of a dependent adult or minor child. As mandated reporters, General Assistance Officers would be required to complete training on mandated reporting every four years.

Nothing in statute prohibits a concerned citizen from making a report to the Department if they have concerns of abuse or neglect of a child or dependent adult. Annually, OCFS receives thousands of reports of suspected child abuse or neglect from individuals who are not mandated reporters or are not making a report in their capacity as a mandated reporter. OCFS has significant concerns that instead of helping children and families, LD 1459 would pose a threat to the well-being of children and families by making parents less likely to seek support through General Assistance for fear of a report to child welfare. Stigmatizing families in this manner and reducing their willingness to seek help when they need it runs contrary to much of the prevention work currently occurring in Maine.

OCFS is actively working with providers and advocates to better differentiate in statute between family circumstances that are due to poverty and those that are due to willful abuse or neglect (see LD 1406). OCFS believes that if enacted, LD 1459 would undermine much of the significant work that has occurred related to the intersection of poverty and child abuse and neglect.

General Assistance plays a vitally important role as a social safety net for Mainers, including children. While OCFS encourages reports when an individual has information that leads them to believe that abuse or neglect of a child is occurring or is very likely to occur, we are actively working to ensure that mandated reporters and the broader community understand that concerns about a family struggling to meet basic needs is not, in and of itself, an issue of abuse or neglect.

For those families, what they need is not a report to the Department, but instead support within their own communities to meet their family's needs.

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

Sincerely,

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW

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