

Written Testimony by  
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to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
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Dear Chairman Ingwersen, Chairman Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

Thank you for accepting my testimony in support of [LD 1893](#) **An Act to Establish an Independent Office of the Child Advocate**.

LD 1893 would establish an independent child advocate to provide oversight of state executive agencies serving children. I understand there is already a child welfare ombudsman that provides some form of oversight for children involved with the Office of Child and Family Services. LD 1893 would expand that role to provide a resource for information, advocacy and quality assurance of services to *all* children receiving services, including and especially those in custody or under supervision of state agencies.

I am a pediatric nurse practitioner with 41 years of experience as well as a nursing educator for the past 22 years. In that time, I have encountered many children whose growth and development was impeded due to a wide variety of factors. While I agree that children who have been abused or neglected and placed in foster care require special attention, I often wonder why there is not more of a preventative approach in our public system. For example, recent reports from the federal Children's Bureau that describe Maine with the second highest rate of child maltreatment underscore the incidence of poverty, addiction and mental illness that defines maltreatment in our state. The current Child Welfare Ombudsman only has jurisdiction to assist children who have already been abused, neglected, left hungry or dealt with the aftermath of parental addiction and mental illness. That kind of assistance seems to me too little too late.

LD 1893 establishes a Child Advocate with broad jurisdiction over all children's services. That will include those services that can be implemented to prevent or lift families out of poverty and away from maltreatment, by helping them better access mental and behavioral health services or other resources that will make a difference.

While LD 1893 still includes authority to receive complaints, Section 9 also mandates the child advocate to perform educational outreach and advocacy and regularly consult with executive agencies, in addition to making public reports. These requirements give the child advocate a platform upon which to elevate children's needs, raising awareness and prompting solutions to meet those needs. I urge Committee members to vote to pass LD 1893 **An Act to Establish an Independent Office of the Child Advocate**.

Thank you for your consideration.

