



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE
LANSING

RYAN SPEIDEL
CHILD ADVOCATE

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Legislature of Maine
2 State House Station
August, ME 04333-0002

Honorable Committee Members,

As Michigan's child advocate, I am writing in support of Maine House Bill 1893, which would create an independent Office of the Child Advocate in Maine similar to what we have in Michigan.

The Michigan Office of the Child Advocate was formed by statute in 1994. Having an independent entity that has the jurisdiction and lawful ability to review the actions of a state's child welfare entities is vital for the safety of the children who reside in Michigan. On countless occasions, my office has worked with child welfare professionals to prevent harm and protect the rights of children and families. In addition, because of the authority vested in my office, we have been able to review and investigate thousands of Michigan's Child Protective Services, foster care, adoption, and juvenile justice cases. These reviews afford us a unique perspective on child welfare and allow us to develop meaningful, actionable recommendations and advise Michigan's governor, members of the Legislature, and the director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services on improvements to the state's child welfare law and policies. Our independent lens is vital to our role in state government.

LD 1893 gives Maine a unique opportunity to reap the benefits of an independent child advocate, and it captures the essence of what a child advocate can do for a state. Establishing an advisory committee to aid in the selection of the child advocate is a brilliant approach to independence. In addition, LD 1893 lays a solid foundation for the child advocate's services and aligns with national best-practices for ombudsman and advocate offices. It is also important to point out that this bill shields employees of the child advocate from having to testify or produce evidence in any judicial or administrative proceeding. This aids in maintaining the confidential nature of the child advocate's work.

In closing, a child advocate, if provided the tools necessary to carry out their core mission, can be a state's best risk mitigation tool. The child advocate can consistently seek to better the child welfare system, step in to prevent harm, review critical incidents, and protect the rights of Maine children. I have been fortunate to be supported by Michigan's governor and Legislature during my tenure, which is at the heart of our success. I hope you support LD 1893 and encourage you to contact me if you have any additional questions about Michigan's Office of the Child Advocate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Speidel".

Ryan Speidel, Michigan's Child Advocate

Ryan Speidel
Michigan's Office of the Child Advocate
LD 1893

Please see attached letter.