

**Testimony of Erica Schair-Cardona  
to the Judiciary Committee**

**In Support of LD 1832**

**Title: An Act to Clarify Available Relief for the Protection of At-risk Children**

**Date of Public Hearing: May 16, 2025**

Dear Judiciary Committee:

My name is Erica Schair-Cardona, and I live in South Portland, Maine. I have been a lawyer since 2005 practicing both in State Court and before Federal Immigration Agencies. I teach in the Refugee Human Rights Clinic ("RHRC") at the University of Maine School of Law. I joined the RHRC in 2018 and supervise student attorneys who represent clients under the age of twenty-one seeking safety and security in the United States. Along with my colleagues at the Clinics at Maine Law ("the Clinics"), we have been supervising student attorneys representing at-risk children for decades. I am writing to testify in my personal capacity in favor of LD 1832, *An Act to Clarify Available Relief for the Protection of At-risk Children*.

The Clinics' mission is two-part: To train the next generation of Maine's attorneys and to represent people from low-income, vulnerable populations. The cases and clients affected by this bill accomplish the Clinic's two-part mission perfectly. As such, representing vulnerable children has been a significant part of the Clinics' practice for decades.

The Clinics were part of the initial team that, along with Senator Bailey and our colleagues, wrote, introduced and advocated for this legislation five years ago. At that time, our goal was to have Maine's law come into compliance with Federal law. Since the passage of M.R.S. Title 22 §4099-I, our student attorneys have represented many vulnerable children seeking safety and security in Maine. These cases have had life-changing impacts on our clients, but also profound

is the impact these cases have had on our student attorneys, many of whom have gone on to represent vulnerable children as licensed attorneys in Maine. The training and experience our students gain from working with these clients in our clinic cannot be understated.

Yet, since the bill's passage, we and other practitioners have realized that there are some minor technical fixes to the language of the existing law that would improve clarity and efficiency for the judiciary and practitioners. I believe that these fixes need to be made now for the sake of our vulnerable clients who have all been abused, neglected and/or abandoned by one or both parents, as well as for us to teach best practices to our law students. As professors we train our students to be excellent advocates because we know that they are the legal bar of tomorrow. We teach them to be clear, concise and respectful of the court's time. And for us to teach most effectively, we need Maine's laws to be clear and promote judicial efficiency as well.

I urge you to pass LD 1832, *An Act to Clarify Available Relief for the Protection of At-risk Children* to make small, but meaningful changes to the existing law that has been utilized to protect some of Maine's most vulnerable children while simultaneously teaching law students how to be compassionate, effective advocates.

Date:

5/15/25

Signed:

