

Jennifer Navarro
Brunswick
LD 555

PUBLIC TESTIMONY TEMPLATE — IN SUPPORT OF LD 555

An Act to Establish the Department of Child and Family Services
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

January 6, 2026

Senator ___, Representative ___, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Jennifer Navarro and I am a [parent / caregiver / and community member] from Brunswick. I am writing to express my strong support for LD 555, which would establish a standalone Department of Child and Family Services.

Maine's child welfare system carries one of the most serious responsibilities of government: protecting children and supporting families in crisis. Currently, the Office of Child and Family Services operates within the

Department of Health and Human Services, one of the largest and most complex agencies in state government.

This structure makes clear accountability and sustained reform difficult.

LD 555 addresses this problem by creating a cabinet-level Department of Child and Family Services, led by a

Commissioner who reports directly to the Governor. This would provide clearer leadership, a focused mission, and stronger accountability—conditions necessary for meaningful reform.

Publicly available data shows that the status quo is not working. According to the Department of Health and

Human Services child fatality dashboard, child deaths involving Office of Child and Family Services history

more than doubled from 68 (2013–2018) to 155 (2019–2024). In 2024 alone, there were 31 child deaths, one of the highest totals on record.

During the same period, state funding for child welfare increased significantly—from approximately \$37 million in SFY 2018 to nearly \$60 million in SFY 2025—demonstrating that funding alone has not resolved systemic failures. These outcomes point to deeper issues of structure, leadership, transparency, and accountability.

LD 555 will not solve every problem, but continuing with the same structure while expecting different outcomes

is no longer acceptable. Children's lives depend on a system that can be clearly led and held accountable when it fails.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support LD 555 and move it forward for full legislative consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Navarro

Brunswick, Maine Homeowner and resident.