

Melanie Blair

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LD 555

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Honorable members of The Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Melanie Blair, I am a foster/adoptive parent from district three and I am here to testify in favor of LD555. The current model of OCFS being part of the largest bureaucracy is failing to protect Maine's Children at exponential rates. According to the Child Fatality Data Website, more children that have had history with DHHS have died as a result of child abuse or neglect in the last five years, than the previous 12. This raises serious questions as to the effectiveness of the current structure. Within the last year, the new Director, Bobbi Johnson, rolled out a five year plan to put forth changes that would improve outcomes. While I do currently see some improvements, we are far from a true resolution as we can clearly see from the continued child deaths. At the current death rate of 30+ children each year, we are looking at a potential of 150 or more child deaths in that time frame. An absolutely unacceptable number. This plan alone is not enough to make the significant, imminent changes that are needed.

The benefits of separation that are currently being implemented by ten other states are:

- *A focused expertise that can ensure specialized training in child welfare improving the quality of services provided to families
- *Tailored programs to address the specific demographic needs of the population making interventions more effective
- *Access to critical specialized services that will help keep children safe
- *Resource allocation that allows resources to be more effectively allocated to the needs of families.
- *Crisis prevention and intervention that can implement proactive strategies.
- *Streamlined Services that would be easier to monitor and evaluate the performance of child welfare services which can lead to greater accountability and improved outcomes.
- *Improved Transparency will build trust with the members of the community.
- *Collaborative Efforts with other agencies (law enforcement, educators, medical professionals, etc.) that support children and families.
- *A separate agency will also raise public awareness and advocacy about child welfare issues that can advocate for policy change and engage the community in prevention efforts and support.

To conclude, I ask you to vote in favor of LD555 because creating a separate Child and Family Services will create a more effective, transparent, and accountable system that will prioritize child safety and well-being.