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Testimony of Senator Brad Farrin
LD 555, “An Act to Create a Separate Department of Child and Family Services”
Committee on Health and Human Services
January 6, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: I am Brad Farrin and I have the honor of representing the people of Senate District 3, which includes towns in Kennebec, Somerset and Penobscot counties. I am before you today testify in support of LD 555, “An Act to Create a Separate Department of Child and Family Services.”

The concerns behind this bill are longstanding. For years, the Legislature has examined the Office of Child and Family Services through audits, oversight investigations, and prior legislative efforts. Despite that work, the same structural problems continue to surface, and the current system has not produced the level of accountability or outcomes Maine’s children deserve.

These failures are not distant or abstract. They are happening now. Just over a week ago, a one-year-old child in Milford died while living in a home without heat or running water. The situation alone is heartbreaking and unacceptable, but the fact that OCFS was involved and the child remained in these conditions in the middle of a Maine winter is particularly egregious. As recently as yesterday, parts of our state experienced below-zero temperatures. When tragedies like this continue to occur under these conditions, it is clear that the system is not protecting children in the most basic ways.

Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. Over the years, dozens of children have died following reports of abuse or during periods of OCFS involvement. Those outcomes reflect a pattern of systemic failure, not individual mistakes, and they show that incremental changes have not been enough to prevent the most serious consequences.

This legislation is not about assigning blame to caseworkers or frontline staff. Many are doing extraordinarily difficult work under immense pressure. The issue is the structure they are working within. Housing child protection inside a massive department with many competing priorities dilutes focus, strains leadership, and weakens accountability.

Creating a standalone Department of Child and Family Services would bring clearer leadership, stronger accountability, and a sharper focus to this critical mission. It would elevate child protection to the priority it must be and better support those responsible for carrying out this work.

I would also be remiss if I did not acknowledge the late Bill Diamond, a former Secretary of State and a tireless advocate for children and families. Bill was a strong supporter of this legislation and spent years fighting for child welfare through his work with Walk a Mile in Their Shoes. He dedicated much of his life to giving a voice to children who had none. Bill passed away this past year, and I firmly believe he would be proud to see this Legislature take meaningful action to protect Maine's most vulnerable children.

This bill presents an opportunity for meaningful, bipartisan action on one of the most fundamental responsibilities of government, protecting children who cannot protect themselves. I urge the committee to move this legislation forward and allow the full Legislature to consider it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.