

Jamie Duncan
Greenville Junction
LD 555

Hello, I'm Jamie Duncan, resident of Greenville and licensed resource parent since 2023. Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony in favor of LD555. Firstly, having been a ward of the court myself until I aged out when I turned 18, I'm extremely grateful that a system exists whose mission is to protect children. It enabled me to stop the cycle of generations of abuse and be in a position to answer the call to help when I received a letter in the mail that a five-year-old relative was in custody. The case is ongoing and I'm bound by confidentiality so I can only speak generally about my experiences over the past two and a half years tho I think this child's case from beginning to what I hope will soon be the end would be a really good case study pointing to all the ways a child can fall through the cracks in the system even when they have strong advocates such as myself working hard for them.

I've been fortunate to access many workshops classes and presentations that teach trauma informed parenting methods where I've learned so much invaluable information and met many other resource parents who all share the same frustrations with the system.

Despite the department existing to protect children, they admittedly make decisions they know are not in the best interest interests of the child to satisfy court orders and honor constitutional rights of parents. Their approach is supposed to be through a clinical lens with the children's best interests as the catalyst for their decisions but without strong advocacy, it is mostly through a legal lens that children move through the system, and it is always at their expense.

As the system stands, it's well-thought-out with reasonable SOPs, but in the collective experiences of resource parents, from caseworkers to supervisors, GALs, therapists, to other supports from Community Care and other organizations, no one is doing their job the way they're supposed to, there is no accountability to remedy that fact, and children are gravely suffering and families destroyed as a consequence.

I was fortunate to have the ear of the late Bill Diamond who was helping me navigate my way through the system right up until just before he died. His work is solid and you can use it as your roadmap forward along with Senator Timberlake's work.

I'd be grateful to be part of the work ahead making long overdue meaningful changes for Maine's children. They have already had it rough, and they deserve so much better than what they presently have to endure.

I think fundamental to these changes has to be affording children the same constitutional rights their parents enjoy. As it stands now they're regarded as little more than property. The system comes in and takes them for their best interest, but the moment that happens, the focus shifts from what's best for the child to what the parents rights are. As we plan to transition OCFS away from the broad umbrella of DHHS where it rightly belongs, please consider adding constitutional rights for children onto LD555. Thank you for your time.