

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.
Commissioner



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April 23, 2019

Senator Michael Carpenter, Chair
Representative Donna Bailey, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 1554 – Resolve, Establishing a Commission To Reform Child Protective Services

Dear Sen. Carpenter, Rep. Bailey, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

This letter is in opposition to LD 1554, Resolve, Establishing a Commission To Reform Child Protective Services. While we share many of the goals and its intention, this commission would be duplicative of work that is already occurring and would slow down rather than accelerate needed improvements to Child Protective Services.

The Department is currently undertaking several projects to ensure adequate analysis, strategic planning, and implementation of necessary policy change within the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), and specifically within the Child Welfare Program. Just since the beginning of the Legislative Session, the Department has begun or continued to engage stakeholders, caseworkers and other child welfare workers, the Public Consulting Group, the Office of the Attorney General, the Child Welfare Ombudsman, and the Legislature, among others, to make sure that we are adequately addressing the needs of Maine's children and their families.

The Department has consulted extensively with the Committee on Health and Human Services, as well as the Committee on Government Oversight and the Office of Program Evaluation (OPEGA) and Government Accountability to discuss the work happening in OCFS to best meet the needs of our most vulnerable children. As a result of the recent OPEGA report and a presentation to the Committee on Government Oversight (GOC), the Commissioner and incoming Director of the Office of Child and Family Services have committed to periodic updates to GOC about the progress on recommended actions. Additionally, OCFS participated in a presentation about Child Protective Services to the Committee on Judiciary.

Finally, it should be noted that child protection records are subject to some of the strictest confidentiality requirements under both state and federal law. Many, if not most, records in OCFS related to child welfare would be unavailable to a legislative committee or require time-consuming redaction.

Respectfully, the Department requests the opportunity to continue its work in partnership with the Legislature and others on our shared goals without the added administrative challenge of the proposed Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne M. Lambrew".

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.
Commissioner