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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Holly Stover presenting

LD 1092, An Act to Prevent the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the State (Previous Title: An Act to Expand Services for Women Who Experience Gender based Trauma and Violence)

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Holly B. Stover, and I represent the Towns of Boothbay, Boothbay Harbor, Edgecomb, Southport, South Bristol and Westport Island.

This bill was submitted as a concept draft with the original title of, “An Act to Expand Services for Women Who Experience Gender based Trauma and Violence.” I would like to present an amendment for your consideration with the title **LD 1092, An Act to Prevent the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the State Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.**

The amendment to LD 1092 seeks to support the Department of Health and Human Services in the development of a coordinated, child-centered approach to addressing suspected sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation, reducing trauma, and connecting youth and their families more rapidly and effectively with the services they need to begin healing and to prevent further harm.

This amendment proposes that the Department of Health and Human Services create a program to prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of children. By January 1, 2024, the Department of Health and Human Services shall create and staff a program that will support regional Child Advocacy Centers¹ and community-based agencies to respond to suspected child sexual abuse and exploitation, connect children and families to resources, and prevent further commercial sexual exploitation of children.

The Department will be provided the resources to support the workforce required to improve Maine’s response to Child Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC). Funds will provide for two positions that will be coordinators for the children and youth who are survivors of commercial sexual exploitation. These positions are to be located within Child Advocacy Centers; one coordinator must be located in the northern region of the State, and one must be located in the southern region.

Additionally, this amendment requests that three high-risk case managers be hired and housed within community-based agencies with known expertise working with commercially exploited children.

¹ [MRSA 22 §4019](#)

Lastly, this amendment requests that a half-time commercial sexual exploitation of children coordinator be housed within a statewide coalition of children's advocacy centers. This position will coordinate services and efforts and create a systemic response to CSEC.

This amendment requests that on or by October 1, 2023, the Department convene an advisory committee to oversee its programming for the intervention and prevention of commercial sexual exploitation of children. The committee will make recommendations about the design of the program and program evaluation strategies. The advisory committee must include representatives from the Department, Maine's Child Advocacy Centers, community-based agencies with expertise working with commercially exploited children, law enforcement agencies and/or prosecutors with direct experience with CSEC, and a statewide coalition of sexual assault centers.

To ensure the continuation of these efforts, by January 2024, the Department shall biannually report to this committee regarding the program. The initial report must include a three-year plan to develop a coordinated, child-centered approach to addressing suspected sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation, reducing trauma, and connecting youths and their families more rapidly and effectively with the services they need to begin healing and preventing further harm. Subsequent reports will outline progress toward the three-year plan and modifications to the plan, including, but not limited to, expanding the plan to address another two years of programming. This committee may submit legislation related to the report.

Every day in Maine, there are children and youth who are sexually abused and used for commercial sexual exploitation. It happens everywhere in our towns and cities and is perpetrated by people who are motivated to control, manipulate and sell children as a commodity. It includes the trafficking of children and frequently illicit drugs within and outside of our State's boundaries. For example, I have worked with state and federal law enforcement on cases where young girls from Maine were moved between Maine and New York and used as "drug mules" and sex trafficked.

This amendment presents an opportunity to formalize and move forward a structure of prevention and intervention for children and youth who are survivors.

I ask that you give this bill careful consideration and know that through your efforts, you can improve how we respond to children and youth who experience commercial sexual exploitation.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter of great importance.

An Act to Prevent the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the State

Sponsor: Representative Holly Stover

Concept: The goal of this legislation is to support the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a coordinated, child-centered approach to addressing suspected sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation, reducing trauma, and connecting youths and their families more rapidly and effectively with the services they need to begin healing and to prevent further harm.

Proposed Language:

Sec. 1. Department of Health and Human Services shall create a program to prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of children. By January 1, 2024, the Department of Health and Human Services shall create and staff a program within the Department to prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of children in the State. The program will support regional Child Advocacy Centers¹ and community-based agencies to respond to suspected child sexual abuse and exploitation, connect children and families to resources, and prevent further commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Sec. 2. Grants to service providers to support workforce. To support the program created in this section, the Department shall make grants to support the following workforce needs:

- A. Two commercial sexual exploitation of children coordinators to be housed within Child Advocacy Centers. One coordinator must be located in the northern region of the State and one must be located in the southern region.
- B. Three high risk case managers to be housed within community-based agencies with expertise working with commercially exploited children.
- C. A half-time commercial sexual exploitation of children coordinator to be housed within a statewide coalition of children's advocacy centers.

Sec. 3. Advisory committee established. No later than October 1, 2023, the Department shall convene an advisory committee to oversee its programming for the intervention and prevention of commercial sexual exploitation of children. The committee will make recommendations about the design of the program and program evaluation strategies. The advisory committee must include representatives from the Department, Maine's Child Advocacy Centers, community-based agencies with expertise working with commercially exploited children, and a statewide coalition of sexual assault centers.

Sec. 4. Reports. Beginning January 2024, the Department shall biannually report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters regarding the program. The initial report must include a three-year plan to develop a coordinated, child-centered approach to addressing suspected sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation, reducing trauma, and connecting youths and their families more rapidly and effectively with the services they need to begin healing and to prevent further harm. Subsequent reports must outline progress toward the three-year plan and modifications to the plan including, but not limited to, expanding the plan to address another two years of programming. The committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters may submit legislation related to the report.

¹ MRSA 22 §4019

Sec. 5. Appropriations and allocations. The following appropriations and allocations are made.

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF
Office of Children and Family Services
Purchased Social Services 0228**

Initiative: Provides ongoing funding for the Department to establish and staff a program to intervene and prevent commercial sexual exploitation of children.

GENERAL FUND	2023-2024	2024-2025
Positions – Legislative Count	1.000	1.000
Personnel Services	\$110,000	\$110,000
All Other	\$20,000	\$20,000
GENERAL FUND TOTAL	\$130,000	\$130,000

Sec. 6. Appropriations and allocations. The following appropriations and allocations are made.

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF
Purchased Social Services 0228**

Initiative: Provides ongoing funding to provide grants to service providers to support workforce needs for the intervention and prevention of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

GENERAL FUND	2023-24	2024-25
Funding for Sexual Assault Services	\$467,500	\$467,500
GENERAL FUND TOTAL	\$467,500	\$467,500