

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF

LD 779 An Act to Create a Separate Department of Child and Family Services

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
January 10th, 2024

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 779 *An Act to create a Separate Department of Child and Family Services* with consideration. We appreciate the work of Senator Timberlake in attempting to ensure that our young people are provided safety and appropriate services and believe this is a solid first step in moving forward.

National studies have found that 47.9% of children aged 2-14 years old have significant clinical behavioral health concerns¹ and although less than 1% of youth in the State of Maine are in Child Protective Custody, they constitute 22% of the youth in residential treatment in 2018². The intersection of youth mental health and the child welfare system is well documented nationally and in our state. Additionally, in June of 2022, the Department of Justice found that Maine violates the Americans with Disability Act as it relates to providing children community-based resources, resulting in children being placed at higher levels of care, including residential treatment in and out of the state, psychiatric hospitalizations, and sadly often within the criminal justice system. In 2019, it was found that 65% of the youth at Long Creek were involved in at least one Child Protective investigation.³ Additionally, the Children's Law and Policy found in 2018-2019 that nearly 70% of the youth committed or sentenced to Long Creek received behavioral health services through MaineCare in the year before the placement, while Long Creek staff reported that 84.6% of the young people at Long Creek arrived with three or more diagnoses.⁴ This is a first step to begin to build the capacity for an infrastructure to maintain our state's youth in safety within their communities, however, we urge this committee to consider the placement of Juvenile Corrections within this department as well.

As we move forward in the state attempting to best support our young people, it is critical we take into consideration all the various components and intersections of systems that impact the trajectory and safety of a young person's life. Because of this, NAMI Maine supports LD 779, An Act to Create a Separate Department of Child and Family Services, acknowledging that this is only the first step in building a stronger and more sustainable system for our state's youth and urging the addition of Juvenile Corrections with this department as well.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: *Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.*

¹ Burns, B., Phillips, S., Wagner, R., Barth, R., Kolko, D., Campbell, Y. Landsverk, J. Mental Health Need and Access to Mental Health Services by Youths Involved with Child Welfare: A National Survey. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. August 2004.

² [United States' Investigation of Maine's Behavioral Health System for Children under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act \(justice.gov\)](#)

³ JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM ASSESSMENT 2020, *supra* n.34, at 47.

⁴ [United States' Investigation of Maine's Behavioral Health System for Children under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act \(justice.gov\)](#)

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA
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