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OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

January 26, 2024

**Senator Joseph Baldacci
Representative Michele Meyer
Co-Chairs, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333**

RE: LD 2095, An Act To Require Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect to Military Family Advocacy Programs

Dear Chairman Baldacci, Vice-Chair Meyer and Honorable Committee Members:

The Department of Defense requests your consideration of policy changes proposed in LD 2095, An Act To Require Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect to Military Family Advocacy Programs. If passed, LD 2095 would create a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that any service member who is involved in a child abuse investigation here in Maine would be reported to that service member's military command to enhance child protective services in the state.

My name is Melissa Willette, and I am the New England Region Liaison for the United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Our mission is to serve as a resource for state leaders, elected officials, and stakeholders regarding issues affecting military families.

The bill, as introduced, would allow the reporting of child abuse to the appropriate military installation when the child is a military family member and ensures efforts to determine the military status of parents subject to abuse or neglect allegations.

There is currently no information-sharing procedure established within the State of Maine, and LD 2095 would allow for the cross sharing of information to begin. Title 10 USC Section 1787 directs the Secretary of Defense to request each state provide the reporting of any known or suspected instance of child abuse and neglect in which the victim or suspect is a member of the armed forces (or spouse). In many instances there is no statutory authority for states to share case information with the appropriate military authorities. This policy change would put Maine in line with the directive.

An issue specifically relating to military families is the frequency at which military families move. The Family Advocacy Program may have information regarding incidents of allegations that occurred in other states where the service member was stationed that DHHS would not otherwise have access to during their investigation. Because military families move

frequently across state lines, lack of information sharing could result in a military family falling through the cracks; and military connected children not receiving the protective services they deserve.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this issue. I look forward to providing public testimony on these policies at the public hearing.

Respectfully,

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New England Region Liaison
(CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT)
Defense-State Liaison Office

CC: Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Senate President Jackson, Sponsor
Scott Young, Deputy Commissioner, DVEM
Molly Bogart, Director of Government Relations, DHHS
Joseph Marro, Senior Policy Advisor, Gov. Janet Mills
Kristen Ferullo, School Liaison Officer, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard