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President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

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Testimony in Support of LD 2095
An Act to Require Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect to Military Family Advocacy Programs

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

January 31, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Troy Jackson. I serve as President of the Maine Senate and have the great honor of representing Aroostook County in the Legislature. I am here today to introduce LD 2095, "An Act to Require Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect to Military Family Advocacy Programs."

Maine is in the midst of a child safety crisis. It's been well documented on the news and the subject of many briefings and public hearings before this committee. There are also a number of bills before you that seek to bring about the widespread systematic changes that are needed to keep our youngest Mainers healthy and safe. This bill, however, would simply close a glaring gap in our system and ensure that children are protected, regardless of what their parents do for a living.

LD 2095 would require the Department of Health and Human Services to collect information about the military status of a child's parent or guardian when an allegation of abuse or neglect is made and share that information with the appropriate military authorities. The proposal would also require the Department to enter into a memorandum of understanding with family advocacy programs at military installations. This would not only help protect children in dire situations, but also bring Maine into compliance with the federal directive instructing the Secretary of Defense to request that states provide this reporting.¹

The goal is to ensure that no child falls through the cracks simply because multiple government agencies have jurisdiction to address allegations of abuse or neglect. This proposal will facilitate the sharing of essential information between appropriate government agencies so children of service members are not lost in the shuffle as they move from state to state.

¹ 10 USC Section 1787 - 36 other states have already enacted this policy
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Every child deserves to grow up in a healthy and safe environment, and government bureaucracy should never be a reason why a child does not get the help they need to thrive. By ensuring that the department proactively communicates with military authorities and military family advocacy programs, we can set our system up for success and ensure that struggling families are able to access the support that they need.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill, I urge you to pass it and to add one more layer of vital communication to our child protective system. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.