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Testimony in Support of LD 2097

"Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Project to Alleviate the Staffing Crisis in the Child Protective Services System"

Sen. Baldacci, Rep. Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Rep. Amy Arata, I represent HD 104, which includes New Gloucester and part of Gray, and I am pleased to testify in support of LD 2097.

As a member of the Government Oversight Committee (GOC), I have been made aware of the challenges within the Office of Child and Family Services, particularly in the area of staffing. A few months ago, Sen. Keim and I met with caseworkers who wanted to speak with us privately. What they shared turned out to be the same information that had been reported by numerous caseworkers to GOC, that there aren't enough caseworkers. This leads to those remaining being overworked, leading to poor job performance, leading to burnout, leading to resignations, leading to a lack of caseworkers, thus repeating the cycle. One of the older caseworkers said, "I wish we still had Case Aides, they freed up a lot of our time". This piqued our interest, since we had been told that only those with certain degrees can be hired as caseworkers and we had been trying to figure out how to recruit more people for these crucial jobs.

A college degree is not required to become a Case Aide and they can perform numerous tasks such as delivering documents, driving children to appointments, and supervising children in the office or hotels. I have included the job description with my testimony. Interestingly, although the Lewiston district has the most Case Aide vacancies, a search of Maine JobLink did not yield any results in Lewiston. LD 2097 would place a focus on advertising for these positions.

I am grateful that Governor Mills said that she will support this bill in her supplemental budget. However, the creation of new positions may not be required. Case Aide positions have already been funded by the legislature, but they are not being filled. I have included a chart which shows the vacancies. A new approach is needed. LD 2097 allows creativity and flexibility to meet the needs of potential employees when recruiting Case Aides. According to the January, 2024, issue of Maine Biz, there is a rise in people "unretiring". Also, stay-at-home parents of young children often look for paid work once their children are old enough to attend school. People with certain disabilities have work hour restrictions. Many people in Maine are looking for meaningful jobs with flexible hours. LD 2097 will allow DHHS to meet the needs of a unique workforce while providing crucial services to families and children.

Thank you for your consideration and please reach out if you have any questions.

