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**THE MAINE SENATE**  
131st Legislature

**Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services on  
LD 2097, Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Project to Alleviate the Staffing Crisis in the  
Child Protective Services System  
January 31, 2024**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I am pleased to cosponsor LD 2097, "Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Project to Alleviate the Staffing Crisis in the Child Protective Services System."

I am sure you are all aware that the Child Protective Services is in critical condition. The recent tragic child deaths were not due to lazy or uncaring caseworkers. On the contrary, our caseworkers are severely overworked to the point that things fall through the cracks. The end result of this can be devastating. For several families, it has been.

Due to the fact that case workers are so overworked, it is becoming increasingly difficult to hire and keep these employees. Why should someone stay in a difficult and stressful job, one described as a "war zone," when he/she can make more money doing something far easier? The current job market is an employee's dream. Businesses are desperate to hire and are willing to raise wages and benefits to interest potential applicants. It is difficult for the public sector to compete. But we must.

We need to explore this issue and learn how to best recruit and retain these essential workers. We are asking too much of those whom we entrust children's lives to. We will lose even more of them if we cannot make significant changes.

LD 2097 will direct the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a pilot program to reorganize case team structure and recruit more case aides in the Child Protective Services system. The pilot program will include a recruitment campaign for retirees and people out of the workforce. Next year, the Department will submit a report to this committee so that the successes can be replicated across the state.

I ask for your favorable consideration and thank you for your attention. Maine's children depend on it.