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THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

LD 2097, Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Project to Alleviate the Staffing Crisis in the Child Protective Services System

January 31, 2024

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Lisa Keim and I proudly represent the citizens of Senate District 19, which includes much of Northern Oxford County and communities in Franklin County. I am here to present LD 2097, "Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Project to Alleviate the Staffing Crisis in the Child Protective Services System."

It is well known that Maine's Child Protective Services is in crisis. In the 2022 Child Maltreatment Report put out by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Maine was one of only seven states that saw an increase in the number of child victims between 2018 and 2022. The number increased by 8.9%. We have had more child deaths in the last three years than the previous 6 combined.

As most of you know, I serve on the Government Oversight Committee, where we have undertaken an investigation of CPS that has been ongoing since 2018. Child safety in Maine has only plummeted since that time. That is why, this year, GOC has intensified our investigation to weekly meetings, inviting stakeholders from every facet of the child protective universe to come share their perspective.

I have gained a deeper understanding of the problems faced by, and within, the Office of Child and Family Services. I know that you all, as members of the oversight committee, are already deeply aware of.

Today's bill is a narrow focus on one of the most urgent issues. We must take immediate steps to lessen the workload and burden on caseworkers – or we risk losing all of them.

Caseworkers are the frontline of child protective work, which is grueling and heartbreaking, an unbelievably challenging and critical job. In GOC we have heard directly from many frontline workers about the difficulties and struggles they face on the job. Caseworkers all across Maine are close to collapse.

The overriding theme of their testimony was that they do not have enough time in their day to do everything that is asked of them. They are desperate for relief. Not only are they making up for their position being chronically understaffed, they are also forced to pick up overnight hours in hotels and hospitals, they take calls at all hours of the day, never truly being able to take a break from the stress of work. Their own families pay the price as their absence and stress takes its toll.

With all of the time that I have spent hearing about OCFS and the roles within that department, the support role of Case Aides has only recently come to my attention, and that of my GOC colleagues.

The role of case aide as described in a Maine State job posting is to:

- Supervise visits between children and their parents, sit with children in hotel and hospital placement, and transport clients for various visits and appointments,
- Make referrals to connect children, parents, and family members with needed services,
- Enter documentation into the Child Welfare information system, Katahdin,
- Maintain legal records and serve court paperwork.

Admittedly, Maine has a dire shortage of **caseworkers**. However, as we listened to caseworkers and their struggle with the mountain of work that is expected of them, along with a case load that is far too high, we readily recognize that assistance in these areas would be an incredible relief, it would, in fact, be transformational.

This resolve directs the Department of Health and Human Services to develop and implement a pilot project in the department's Office of Child and Family Services for the recruitment and employment of case aides in the child protective services system for those areas of the child protective services system where there is the greatest need for assistance, as determined by the department. I would encourage the Department to take this golden opportunity of a pilot project to consider reorganizing case team structure, and to increase the recommended number of case aides for each district.

The Department should also utilize exit interview information and interviews of current case aides to look for common issues that cause workers to leave and strengths that make them want to stay.

This pilot project will include a public recruitment campaign that targets retirees and other people not in the state's workforce. We must also request the Department to explore options such as job sharing and part time work and welcome "outside the box" ideas. It is also imperative that we exempt this project from union negotiations and amend the language of this bill if that is not clearly allowed. The long process of gaining union acceptance of ideas will defeat the purpose of this initiative. We must allow agility and creativity in recruitment and design of roles. We cannot allow time-consuming negotiations with outside entities to bog down and delay this project because it is meant to be a learning opportunity. Success will be measured by employee retention, job satisfaction and of course, improved oversight of our children and their families who are in crisis. This is a statewide issue but we need to see what works and what doesn't before we go all in on one strategy.

The critical nature of this work, and the dire time we are in, cannot be overstated. That is why this bill is an emergency measure. All options need to be on the table and given that action should be immediate, I was heartened that Gov. Janet Mills stated her support for this bill in her State of the State Address.

This effort to recruit and retain more caseworkers is one of the top priorities of the Government Oversight Committee as we work to improve our child welfare system. The initiative to give caseworkers support through aides, is one solution.

Ultimately, the recruitment and structure changes deemed most suitable can all be tested through implementing a pilot project focused on frontline personnel, and bring help where it is needed most.

The Department will submit a report on the effectiveness of the pilot program and any recommendations to expand recruitment efforts to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. This committee will then determine what next steps should be with the information in the report.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.



Child Protective Services Case Aide

Rockland, Maine, United States | Community & Social Services | Full-time

Apply by: Feb. 8, 2024



Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

Opening Date: January 26, 2024

Closing Date: February 8, 2024

Job Class Code: 5074

Grade: 18 (Pro/Tech)

Salary: \$18.47 – \$24.72/hr.

Position Number: 02021-0701

Core Responsibilities:

As a Child Protective Services Case Aide, you will play a vital role in the support and reunification of families served by the Office of Child and Family Services – Child Welfare division. You will:

- Supervise visits between children and their parents, sit with children in hotel and hospital placement, and transport clients for various visits and appointments
- Make referrals to connect children, parents, and family members with needed services
- Enter documentation into the Child Welfare information system, Katahdin
- Maintain legal records and serve court paperwork

A successful candidate will have strong interpersonal skills, organizational and computer skills. This position is part of a team dynamic that's main objective is to assist, inform, and interact with the public. ***Your work will include significant travel within areas served by the local district office and will include occasional mandatory overtime.***

Minimum Qualifications:

To qualify, your background must include training, education, or experience in office and client support work that demonstrates 1) competency in applying a proficient knowledge of the

principles and practices in assisting management with policies and procedures, and 2) the ability to use independent judgment, initiative, and decision-making on complex administrative and direct service activities. Preference will be extended to candidate possessing the following skills/experience:

1. Prior experience working directly with children and families in a social services setting.
2. Skilled in the use of standard work-place applications (MS Word, EXCEL, Outlook, etc.).

Agency information:

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is dedicated to promoting health, safety, resilience, and opportunity for Maine people. The Department provides health and social services to approximately a third of the State's population, including children, families, older Mainers, and individuals with disabilities, mental illness, and substance use disorders. The Department also promotes public health, operates two state psychiatric hospitals, and provides oversight to health care providers.

The Office of Child & Family Services (OCFS), within DHHS is responsible for ensuring the safety, permanency and well-being of children and families through community networks, local resources, and life-long family connections throughout Maine. **We have a vacancy in our Rockland office.**

Application Information:

Please submit all documents or files in PDF format.

For additional information about this position please contact Diana DeLorenzo, at (207) 596-4383. **To apply, please upload a recent resume (if available) and cover letter addressing each of the two competency areas identified in the above section.**

To request a paper application, please contact Ashley.Smith@Maine.gov.

Benefits

No matter where you work across Maine state government, you find employees who embody our state motto—"Dirigo" or "I lead"—as they provide essential services to Mainers every day. We believe in supporting our workforce's health and wellbeing with a valuable total compensation package, including:

- **Work-Life Balance** – Rest is essential. Take time for yourself using **13 paid holidays, 12 days of sick leave, and 3+ weeks of vacation leave** annually. Vacation leave accrual increases with years of service, and overtime-exempt employees receive personal leave.
- **Health Insurance Coverage** – The State of Maine pays **85%-100%** of employee-only premiums (\$10,150.80-\$11,942.16 annual value), depending on salary. Use this chart to find the premium costs for you and your family, including the percentage of dependent coverage paid by the State.

- **Health Insurance Premium Credit** – Participation decreases employee-only premiums by 5%. Visit the Office of Employee Health and Wellness for more information about program requirements.
- **Dental Insurance** – The State of Maine pays 100% of employee-only dental premiums (\$350.40 annual value).
- **Retirement Plan** – The State of Maine contributes 13.16% of pay to the Maine Public Employees Retirement System (MainePERS), on behalf of the employee.
- **Gym Membership Reimbursement** – Improve overall health with regular exercise and receive up to \$40 per month to offset this expense.
- **Health and Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts** – Set aside money pre-tax to help pay for out-of-pocket health care expenses and/or daycare expenses.
- **Public Service Student Loan Forgiveness** – The State of Maine is a qualified employer for this federal program. For more information, visit the Federal Student Aid office.
- **Living Resources Program** – Navigate challenging work and life situations with our employee assistance program.
- **Parental leave** is one of the most important benefits for any working parent. All employees who are welcoming a child—including fathers and adoptive parents—receive **four weeks of fully paid parental leave**. Additional, unpaid leave may also be available, under the Family and Medical Leave Act.
- **Voluntary Deferred Compensation** – Save additional pre-tax funds for retirement in a MaineSaves 457(b) account through payroll deductions.
- Learn about **additional wellness benefits** for State employees from the Office of Employee Health and Wellness.

There's a job and then there's purposeful, transformative work. Our aim is to create a workplace where you can learn, grow, and continuously refine your skills. Applicants demonstrate job requirements in differing ways, and we appreciate that many skills and backgrounds can make people successful in this role.

As an Equal Opportunity employer, Maine State Government embraces a culture of respect and awareness. We are committed to creating a strong sense of belonging for all team members, and our process ensures an inclusive environment to applicants of all backgrounds including diverse race, color, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, physical or mental disability, religion, age, ancestry, national origin, familial status or genetics.

If you're looking for a great next step, and want to feel good about what you do, we'd love to hear from you. Please note reasonable accommodations are provided to qualified individuals with disabilities upon request.

Thinking about applying?

Research shows that people from historically excluded communities tend to apply to jobs only when they check every box in the posting. If you're currently reading this and hesitating to apply for that reason, we encourage you to go for it! Let us know how your lived experience and passion set you apart.

Apply by: Feb. 8, 2024