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Testimony of the Office of Child and Family Services
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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

Sponsor: Senator Keim
Hearing Date: January 31, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Bobbi Johnson, and I serve as the Director of the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to testify in support of LD 2097, *Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Project to Alleviate the Staffing Crisis in the Child Protective Services System*.

This resolve directs the Department to implement a pilot project focused on recruitment and employment of additional case aides. Case aides play an invaluable role in the operation of OCFS' District Offices and the work of child welfare field staff. They provide administrative support that allows licensed social workers serving as caseworkers to focus on direct work to ensure the safety and well-being of children and families. The biennial budget increased the pay for these 48 positions, of which 10 are currently vacant.

OCFS supports testing innovative approaches to hiring case aide positions within the District Offices as one solution to alleviate some of the workload pressures that OCFS' child welfare staff are currently experiencing. Furthermore, we are in support of a public recruitment campaign that would supplement and support our ongoing staff recruitment efforts statewide.

We are committed to addressing the staff concerns that current caseloads are unmanageable. While we can't control the number of appropriate reports or cases our staff must manage, we can pursue every available opportunity to ensure our staff have the resources and support they need to allow them to do their job efficiently and effectively and that includes strong administrative support.

We want to thank Sen. Keim for bringing this proposal forward and appreciate the efforts of the sponsors to listen to our staff's concerns and seek innovative solutions to addressing those concerns.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and to make myself available for questions at the work session.