



## Maine Child Welfare Action Network

Testimony of Melissa Hackett

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In opposition to LD 752: "An Act to Strengthen Maine's Child Protection Laws by Limiting  
Contact with Violent Offenders"

March 10, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett, and I am offering testimony in opposition to LD 752 on behalf of the Maine Child Welfare Action Network. We are a group of organizations and individuals working together to ensure the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families in Maine.

Since this bill relates to child safety, it feels important to begin with what we know about child abuse and neglect. We know from research and evidence what the risk factors are, and we know what can work to prevent and lessen harm. It is also important to ground our conversation in the recognition that it is best for children if they can grow up safely with their families. Separating children from their families causes trauma that can have negative impacts on short- and long-term well-being. Our strategies to reduce child maltreatment must reflect this by working to strengthen families so they can provide safety and stability for their children. Our Network has worked with DHHS and many state agency and community partners, and most importantly, families, to develop Maine's Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan, which articulates this framework for keeping children safe by keeping families strong.

Effective strategies impact individual behaviors and acknowledge the relationships of family, school, community, and societal factors that influence risk and protective factors for violence.<sup>1</sup> This includes modifying policies, practices, and societal norms to create safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for children. Targeted efforts include policy solutions to provide economic and concrete supports to families in times of need, and services that ensure essential supports like child care, housing, food, and health care are available to families.<sup>ii</sup>

The conditions in households that lead to risk for child abuse and neglect are complex and nuanced, often involving parental challenges, including domestic violence. Economic hardship and social isolation often exacerbate issues. To prevent harm in these situations, we need to intervene with the specific supports families need to address challenges to child safety.

Given the complexity and sensitivity of each family's situation, these decisions are best left to be handled on a case-by-case basis by the providers, caseworkers, attorneys, and judges focused in this area of work, to ensure the appropriate supports and services are put into place for families to work toward safety and stability when there are challenges that need to be addressed.

We also know that social stigma and fear of losing a child to state custody often prevent parents from seeking help when they need it. This is especially true for women who are victims of domestic violence. We should not underscore the fear and stigma they already face in accessing support by creating an additional burden on them regarding a failure to protect - at the risk of losing custody of their child – as this bill would do.

We all care deeply about the safety and well-being of Maine's children. We must engage in policy discussions that represent meaningful opportunities to reduce risks to child safety, and better support families in achieving safety and stability for their children. This proposal offers no such pathway and instead could have a negative impact on families navigating challenging situations in their efforts to achieve safety for their children. I strongly urge the committee to vote ought not to pass. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Violence Prevention, Prevention Strategies  
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/prevention.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Chapin Hall, A Key Connection: Economic Stability and Family Well-being. Addressing economic hardship as a factor in child welfare involvement <https://www.chapinhall.org/project/a-key-connection-economic-stability-and-family-well-being/>