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Testimony of Representative Amy Roeder introducing

LD 52, An Act to Require the Department of Health and Human Services to Apply for Federal Benefits on Behalf of Children in the Department's Custody Who May Be Eligible for Those Benefits

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Amy Roeder, and I represent House District 23, which includes a portion of the great City of Bangor.

I am here today to introduce **LD 52, An Act to Require the Department of Health and Human Services to Apply for Federal Benefits on Behalf of Children in the Department's Custody Who May Be Eligible for Those Benefits.**

This bill requires the Department of Health and Human Services to determine if a child is eligible for federal benefits from the United States Social Security Administration or the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and apply for them on the child's behalf, if necessary. Additionally, LD 52 requires the department to provide training to children receiving a federal benefit as well as department staff and representative payees who receive the federal benefit on behalf of a child.

According to a 2021 federal report¹ prepared to address questions regarding children in the U.S. foster care system and their Social Security Benefits, about 27,000 children in foster care receive benefits from the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program due to their own disability or based on the retirement, disability or death of an insured parent each year. In more than 80% of these cases, the Social Security Administration appoints the state child welfare agency as the child's representative payee to receive and manage the SSI/Social Security benefits on the child's behalf.

¹ "Children in Foster Care and Social Security Administration Benefits: Frequently Asked Questions." *Congressional Research Service*, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R46975.pdf>.

LD 52 would make sure this is happening in Maine, too.

My son experienced this issue when he didn't receive any of the death benefits he was entitled to when his birth father passed away. It was only when he turned nine, when we adopted him, that he began receiving his benefits, which means the state kept that money to offset his care for six or seven years.

This practice doesn't set up children in Maine's foster care system for opportunities to accumulate savings in the future. LD 52 would provide better education to young Mainers in foster care regarding financial literacy training and support, which would help them to navigate benefits when they age-out of the system.

According to a 2013 report published by the United States Social Security Administration Office, youth who leave foster care without permanent homes, typically at age 18, often have difficulty securing housing and income sufficient to shelter and support themselves. Among youth who had been in foster care at age 17, a quarter reported being homeless and one-third reported receiving public benefits, including nutritional assistance or housing assistance, by age 19.

We have the opportunity to better support our foster kids, and we should take it.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.