

Testimony of Melissa Hackett

Coordinator, Maine Child Welfare Action Network

In support, LD 802, Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Design a Mentoring Program for Youth Who Have Extended Care and Support Agreements with the Department

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett. I am the coordinator for the Maine Child Welfare Action Network. I offer testimony today in support of LD 802.

I appreciate the opportunity to offer support of this legislation, which would initiate the development of a mentoring program for youth who have extended care and support agreements with the Department. Young people who have experienced foster care have shared that this is something they want, and believe would be beneficial in supporting their transition into adulthood.

As I have shared with this committee on prior legislation, the transition to adulthood is an important and often challenging phase for young people, but youth aging out of foster care often experience this without the support of stable, permanent adult relationships, and the resources that can come with that. Data shows that this group of young people experience significant challenges during this transitional period, across a variety of issues, including successful high school completion, stable housing, justice involvement, early parenthood, and employment.

Participation in extended care agreements provides youth with an opportunity to continue to receive state support as they make that challenging transition into adulthood. Young people have also shared how important and impactful it is to have peers who share their experience, to provide support and guidance as they navigate life's challenges.

This legislation provides an important opportunity to be responsive to what young people want and believe will support their transition into adulthood. With state supports and mentorship, young people who have experienced foster care will have a better chance of getting the kind of support they need, when they need it, to ensure their success.

Thank you.