

Testimony of Melissa Hackett
Coordinator, Maine Child Welfare Action Network
In support of LD 1060, An Act to Provide Funding to Reduce Stigma for Parents Seeking
Support
April 4, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett. I am a policy associate with Maine Children's Alliance and serve as the coordinator for the Maine Child Welfare Action Network. I am offering testimony today in support of LD 1060.

The Be There for ME campaign was initiated from the Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan when the short-term version was released in May 2023. The 131st Legislature generously allocated \$750,000 in one-time funding to develop a campaign and website to normalize the challenges of parenting and promote help-seeking and knowledge of resources.

It quickly became much more than a campaign. MCWAN and DHHS worked in partnership to outreach and recruit parents first to share their perspectives around the challenges families were facing, and then to inform the development of the campaign and website – from start to finish. It became a true partnership. From the colors and the logo to the words we chose for the website, Be There for ME is deeply informed by the perspectives of the diverse group of parents we worked with to develop, promote, and launch it. I am deeply grateful to these parents for sharing their expertise and time with us to get this right.

Being a parent is hard. And while every family is unique, being a parent is a universally challenging one. It doesn't come with instructions, and too many families are left navigating the experience of parenting alone, without social support or connection to resources to help them along the way. If we want kids to be safe and supported, we need to invest in their parents and their ability to provide that safety and stability. That starts with meaning it when we say it's okay to ask for help. And it means showing up in all the small and big ways for them – without judgement - as community members and in our professional roles.

To illustrate how too many families in Maine feel right now, I would share this story. During the focus groups to develop the campaign, we offered parents options for the name. One I was very fond of was "A Village for ME." I was surprised when every parent and caregiver group we brought this to responded with a resounding "no" to the name. One parent reflected that everyone says there's a village when you become a parent, but it's not true, and that hurts. Another parent joked that they must not have gotten the phone number for

the village. Still another remarked that where they came from, there actually was a village of support that didn't exist here. I share this because I think many of us like the idea, and have the belief, that there is a village of support for families in Maine.

It is an unfulfilled promise we have made. And it's time to make good on it. It starts by investing in parents and supporting them without judgement – because life is hard and everyone needs help sometimes. That is especially true for parents as they navigate their own personal challenges and those they experience in their role as parents. A parent partner has reminded me that I am also a parent, as I have often thought to take off that “hat” when I am in my professional role. But it's not that simple. I am always also a parent. And I have struggled, as I think every parent has at some point, and felt embarrassed or scared to reach out for help. We need to counteract this stigma and fear with support.

That starts with the messages of support and hope and connections to places to start to reach out that Be There for ME offers. It is a small price to pay to support families feeling they can reach out for help sooner, and get the support they need, when and where they need it, to take care of themselves and their children. I hope you will join me in supporting this important legislation. Thank you.