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Testimony of Representative Michele Meyer presenting
**LD 1060, An Act to Provide Funding to Reduce Stigma for Parents
Seeking Support**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Ingwersen, esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Representative Michele Meyer, serving the people of southern Maine's District 150, all of Eliot and parts of Kittery and South Berwick. I am honored to introduce LD 1060, An Act to Provide Funding to Reduce Stigma for Parents Seeking Support.

We all care about the safety and well-being of Maine children. One very important way we can demonstrate our care and concern for kids is by supporting their parents. I am proud of the support I have offered in the development of Maine's Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan, which establishes a collective framework for keeping children safe by keeping families strong.

One core tenet of this plan is acknowledgement that parents face stigma and fear in reaching out for help, which represents a significant barrier to ensuring they can get the help they need, when they need it, to care for themselves and their children.

Responding to the fear and stigma Maine parents face expressed about reaching out for and receiving help, in 2023 the Department of Health and Human Services and the Maine Child Welfare Action Network, began working together with parents and community partners to develop a campaign focused on normalizing the challenges of parenting and encouraging and connecting to opportunities to reach out for support through a new website – BeThereforME.org. Notably, the website is intentionally streamlined, so it's not overwhelming for parents to navigate, and highlights places where parents can talk to someone to support them in navigating possible supports.

Parent partnership is another core principle of the Plan, and this was demonstrated in the development of Be There for ME. By working in partnership with parents, partners were able to produce a campaign and website that reflects what parents say they need, in the ways and words they use to talk about their

own lives. The strength of Be There for ME is how much it was developed and informed by parents, for parents. The campaign messages normalize the challenges of parenting universally and encourage seeking support. The website offers places to start to reach out for support across a variety of issues, including health care, food, child care, housing, and behavioral health.

Be There for ME was developed as part of a one-time \$750,000 budget initiative in the 131st Legislature, after the first version of the Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan was launched in May of 2023.

This bill is a critical opportunity to ensure the foundation that has been established through the Be There for ME campaign and website is sustained. The fiscal note reflects a modest investment in ongoing paid promotion and website maintenance to ensure this. It is a small price to pay to make sure parents in Maine hear loud and clear the message that being a parent is hard, it's okay to ask for help, and there is support out there. I hope you will join me in supporting this bill.