

Testimony of Melissa Hackett  
Coordinator, Maine Child Welfare Action Network  
In support of LD 1061, An Act to Increase Community Support for Families in Maine  
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 1061.

The purpose of the statewide Maine Child Abuse Prevention Councils is to encourage and maintain coordinated community efforts in each county to prevent child abuse and neglect through family-strengthening programs. The Prevention Councils are each county's primary community organizations providing services and coordinating community efforts to prevent child abuse by strengthening families. Services can include public awareness activities, child safety education, parent education, support and information for parents, referral to services, and training for professionals.

Despite this important role, the Prevention Councils have not been funded across the board at a level that ensures they have the capacity to be that community go-to resource for families looking for support, and for community members looking for somewhere to send families when they are experiencing challenges. Importantly, the services they provide are universal, so any parent can access them. This helps to destigmatize receiving support, and that in turn makes it more likely families will reach out when they need help.

The Prevention Councils have come up time and again in the work of the Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan, as an important resource for families that we not able to fully leverage right now. Parents and community partners have shared the need for more community supports and resources, opportunities for social connection, and training and education related to mandated reporting and supporting families.

I recognize the financial constraints and scarcity mindset we are all experiencing right now. And I would ask the committee and your colleagues in the Legislature to consider the cost of the investment we have made in our state's child welfare agency to intervene with families when they are in crisis and children are unsafe. There is a tremendous financial and emotional cost to that for families and for our state. We need to invest upstream, to support families before they are in crisis, so they can provide safety and stability for their own children. This is better for children, and it's less costly and traumatic than an intervention from a state agency with the power to separate children from their families.

If we care about the safety and well-being of children in Maine, we can show that by investing in community supports for their families, and the Prevention Councils play an important role in developing and sustaining supportive communities. I urge you to support this legislation and build out the family support system in Maine.

Thank you.