

Written Testimony in Support of LD 1061

Provided by: Kara Hay, Penquis

April 4, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Kara Hay, and I am the President and Chief Executive Officer for Penquis, Maine's largest Community Action Agency. I am also a long-time resident of Penobscot County and a mother to my amazing son Sam. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of LD 1061.

Known formally as the Maine Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Councils, the purpose of the Maine Prevention Councils is to encourage and maintain coordinated community efforts in each county to prevent child abuse and neglect through the provision of family-strengthening programs.

Two of Maine's Prevention Councils have been embedded within and led by Penquis for over 20 years. Both the Penobscot and Piscataquis Prevention Council encourage and coordinate community efforts to prevent child abuse from occurring. Penquis's Prevention Councils provide a trusted, non-stigmatizing place for all parents and caregivers to receive the support all parents need from time to time.

Our Prevention services include public awareness activities, evidenced based parent education, child safety education, training for professionals, referrals to services and concrete support for families. Our Prevention Councils are committed to implementing data-informed strategies to meet the needs of our community and deliver evidence-based prevention strategies that work.

In this current program year in rural Piscataquis County with **.64 total staff** and in Penobscot County with **1.8 total staff** the following was served

- **346 professionals were trained in Protective Factors, Infant Safe Sleep, Period of PURPLE Crying, and Mandated Reporting**
- **439 parents/caregivers were reached through Parenting Education classes including Nurturing Fathers, Nurturing Parenting Through Recovery, Nurturing HOPE for Parents of Children with Special Needs and Active Parenting**
- **1200 parents/caregivers and children built social connections through local playgroups and story times**
- **5489 individuals were reached through community events and activities**

I am proud to say that our Prevention Councils have worked very hard over the years, building a very strong network within our communities.

- We partner with **7** local libraries to offer ongoing playgroups, Storytimes, and family fun nights
- We collaborate with **34** other programs and organizations to hold community events
- **37** organizations are represented on our Advisory Committee
- **20** businesses have sponsored the Prevention Council throughout the year
- **20** parents currently represent our Parent Leadership Team, volunteering over **200** hours this year in partnership with the Council attending meetings and events within their community.

Every community benefits from having a local entity that is focused on creating spaces and services that build relationships and have knowledge about resources that are available. The Prevention Councils are that place that community members and families can go to for support without judgement.

LD 1061 proposes to support the critical and statutory role the Maine Prevention Councils have as the primary community entity to coordinate and provide strategic support and services to prevent child abuse and neglect locally. This legislation would increase our capacity to provide universal community support for families to promote child safety and family well-being.

Our community efforts use evidence-based and informed efforts to support families and are less costly than treatment and interventions. We strengthen families and prevent the need for downstream child welfare involvement. The upstream investment in children and families pays off.

I strongly urge you to support this bill on behalf of Penobscot and Piscataquis' children, families, and communities.