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2 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002  
(207) 287-1400

## **Michele Meyer**

58 Odiorne Lane  
Eliot, ME 03903

Phone: (207) 438-9197

[Michele.Meyer@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Michele.Meyer@legislature.maine.gov)

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### *Testimony of Representative Michele Meyer presenting*

## **LD 1061, An Act to Increase Community Support for Families in Maine**

### *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 1061, An Act to Increase Community Support for Families in Maine.

As my colleagues know, child and family well-being are important issues I care deeply about. We know that what keeps children safe is keeping families strong. One of the most important ways we can do that is by building out a community of support for families, where parents feel they have people and places they can turn to when they face challenges. Since parenting can be difficult and hard times can fall on any family, it is critical that supportive communities are available for every family, wherever they live in our state.

This recognition and value is reflected currently in Maine statute. The statewide network of Prevention Councils has a statutory role to review existing data to assess and monitor the extent and causes of child abuse and neglect in each county, and to carry out the following activities: coordinate services, provide training, and provide education and awareness related to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Beyond statute, as the lead entity in each county focused on strengthening families to keep children safe, they play an important coordinating role in bringing together various partners to strengthen the overall community of support around families.

Despite their statutory role, the Prevention Councils have lacked sufficient funds to build capacity and leverage relationships to build those strong, supportive communities we know families rely on for social connection and access to supports and services that reduce family stress and crisis. With the release of the long-term version of Maine's Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan, we have a framework for how everyone can take action to keep children safe by keeping families strong. The Prevention Councils have a clear and important role to play in this work, through supporting stigma

reduction in parents receiving support, partnering with families, and collaborating with state and other community partners.

Other specific efforts include:

- Bolstering community-level efforts to provide concrete supports to meet urgent needs of families
- Embedding whole family and two-generation approaches into program design and service delivery
- Supporting primary prevention efforts that create the conditions for supportive communities
- Encouraging everyone to play a role in advancing child safety and family well-being
- Expanding and enhancing community spaces where families can gather and build social connections

This legislation provides a critical opportunity to move upstream with our investment in children and families and the communities they live and work in. When we help families better and sooner, provided by the people in the community they know and trust, we strengthen child safety, and prevent the need for more intensive and traumatic state child welfare agency intervention. This is better for Maine children, their families, and the overall prosperity of our state. I urge you to join me in supporting this legislation. Thank you.