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April 8, 2025

132nd Maine Legislature

Testimony from Debbie Little concerning LD 1150, HPO755

Presented by Representative Mastraccio of Sanford

Hello! My name is Debbie Little and I come before you today as one mad mama at the broken system but also as a highly concerned Sanford community member. First, thank you for allowing me to come and testify on behalf of LD 1150, an Act To Require Reporting of Sheltering or Aiding Missing Children. Thank you to Representative Mastraccio for moving this forward for consideration. I am married to my husband George, going on 29 years, and have four beautiful children. We have lived in the Sanford community for almost 21 years. My husband and I have been heavily involved in the community, in various roles, everything from PTA, Band, Sports, and also where my husband pastors a small congregation. My youngest is our son, Michael. Just turned seventeen. Biologically, he is my great nephew. We had the privilege of transitioning him into our care just after he turned five years old and adopted him a little over a year after that. We were proud to officially add him to our Little crew and haven't batted an eye since.

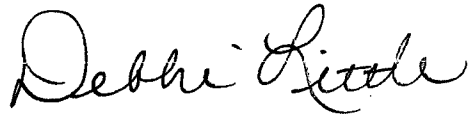
April of 2024 started our family nightmare trying to navigate the mental health system and juvenile system in this state. At the end of April 2024, my son decided to "run away". He was on the "run" for just shy of six weeks. During that time, we had learned that other parents and families were harboring Michael for a few days to a week or more. When we would receive a tip on where our son was located, I would immediately call the Sanford Police Department to report his location. In return the Sanford Police Department would dispatch an officer to that location. When they arrived, they were told Michael wasn't there and they had to leave without my son in their custody. I quickly found out that the police are not able to do anything besides ask if my son was in their house. If they are told no, they have to walk away. Nothing more can be done. After the first few times of the police checking into his location, we found out that we were not able to press charges against anyone who harbored my son. It isn't right! As well, during that same timeframe of him being on the run, we later discovered that he went on "vacation" for a week with a family, out of state without our knowledge or permission. We quickly found out, we couldn't press charges on that family because at that time, my son was sixteen and seemed to have more rights than we did as parents. But yet, if my husband and I were going through a nasty divorce and he took my son out of state without my permission or knowledge, I can press

kidnapping charges- per what I know and understand at this time. Make this, make sense. You can't, no matter how you look at it.

It sickened my husband and I when we could not hold people accountable for their actions and keeping my son hidden when he desperately needed mental health services. Some of these families absolutely are known for harboring runaways and getting the runaways looped into the alcohol and drug scene.

Maine has nothing written to hold these types of people accountable. It needs to change and I hope this is the start of making the necessary changes needed to ensure families like mine can get help.

Thank you for your time and consideration! If you would like any additional information from me, please feel free to reach out. I am more than willing to share more of our family story!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debbie Little".

Debbie Little

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