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Testimony of the Office of Child and Family Services
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In opposition to LD 1397, *An Act to Fund Community-based Organizations to Prevent and Reduce the Risk of Children's Involvement in the Child Welfare System*

Sponsor: Representative Crafts
Hearing Date: April 8, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Bobbi Johnson, and I serve as the Director of the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to testify in opposition to LD 1397, *An Act to Fund Community-based Organizations to Prevent and Reduce the Risk of Children's Involvement in the Child Welfare System*.

LD 1397 would create a new statutory authorization for OCFS' child welfare division that would require child welfare to provide funding for community-based organizations to administer family-centered programs that provide positive childhood experiences and lead to increased social and economic mobility for families. This new provision would require that support be directed to programs rated as promising or better in the IV-E Clearinghouse as well as those that take a 2-generation/whole family approach to prevention.

Before I go further, I wanted to make clear that OCFS does not oppose increased access to prevention programming statewide and particularly appreciates the focus on family-centered programs that are supported by evidence as the focus of this bill. What OCFS does not support is the addition of a new statutory duty for OCFS as Maine's child welfare agency. The primary role of child welfare is to intervene to protect abused or neglected children and those at substantial risk of abuse or neglect. While primary prevention efforts are key to preventing the need for child welfare involvement, OCFS believes the efforts around prevention and the way those services and supports are received by families is strengthened when the child welfare agency is not wholly responsible for these efforts, and instead is a partner along with the other DHHS offices whose work directly impacts the well-being of families (such as OFI, OMS, and DSER), community partners, and the Department's Special Projects Manager for Child and Family Well-being.

OCFS is also concerned that the bill as drafted would provide a new statutory mandate for child welfare but includes no associated funding to support this work. OCFS has limited funding, most

of which is devoted to supporting child welfare and child care efforts. Much of this funding is derived from federal sources and can only be used for specific purposes. An example is Federal Title IV-E funding Maine receives to assist with the care of children in State custody. Several years ago, there was a new stream of IV-E funding created for prevention efforts under the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). Maine was one of the first State's with an approved FFPSA plan and has been actively implementing FFPSA over the last few years. While FFPSA creates a federal funding stream for prevention services, the rules and regulations for this funding stipulate that children must be at imminent risk of removal in order to qualify for the services and as such our current child welfare focus on implementation of FFPSA has been centered around supporting tertiary prevention efforts with these families.

OCFS strongly supports efforts to expand and enhance primary prevention programming statewide. We have worked with a number of partners including the Maine Children's Trust, Maine's Prevention Councils, the Maine Child Welfare Action Network, and others. OCFS was also a partner in the creation of Maine's Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan which establishes a framework of shared responsibility to strengthen families and keep children safe. The plan includes a specific focus around whole-family strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect and improve the well-being of Maine's families. Below is an excerpt from the Plan that we believe provides a strong roadmap for the role of child welfare.

Maine's Child Safety and Family Well-Being Continuum



Notably, in the Plan, there is no strategy that aligns with the new statutory mandate for child welfare proposed in this bill.

OCFS appreciates this Committee's strong commitment to supporting prevention efforts, as well as the Sponsor's desire to enhance these services. OCFS is also grateful for the effort of numerous community partners in the development of Maine's recently updated Child Safety and Family

Well-Being Plan and would encourage a focus on enacting and enhancing prevention efforts built around the strategies identified in the Plan.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and to make myself available for questions at the work session.