

Letter from the Center for Parent Leadership and Advocacy in Child Welfare
In support of LD 1406, An Act to Amend Certain Definitions in the Child and Family Services and
Child Protection Act
April 8, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, members of the Committee, we respectfully submit this letter of support to you from the Center for Parent Leadership and Advocacy in Child Welfare (CPLA).

We are a group of parents who have successfully navigated the child welfare system and reunified with our children. We have all worked hard to improve our families' lives and get to where we are today.

We support this bill. Many states have updated their definitions of neglect to clarify it as withholding of a resource parents have, not one that is absent in their home, and we believe it is time for Maine to do the same.

Poverty is often mistaken for neglect, and it takes skill to know the difference. Neglect must be intentional; not having a resource is not the same as choosing to withhold it. Understanding the distinction between poverty and neglect is crucial for developing effective policies and interventions. While both issues require attention, their root causes and solutions differ. The role of the state child welfare agency is to intervene when children are unsafe. Community members and organizations are better suited to address resource issues related to conditions of poverty.

We should not punish families for what they can't control. Many families are working hard and still can't make ends meet. It's not from lack of trying; it's from lack of resources. With the continued rising costs of housing, food, and clothing, many parents are working more for less. This includes spending less time with our children and more time trying to provide however we can.

Families who are living in poverty often need trusted help to access resources. Access to resources and services are very different in some places than others.

It's also important to recognize the harm of removing children from their homes. Those of us who have adult children can tell you the impact of being separated from their parents lasts a lifetime. It's scary for a child to live somewhere new with people they don't know. Attachment is disrupted, often at critical stages in a child's development. This is an unnecessary trauma in situations where parents could be supported with the financial means to keep their child in their own home and avoid the harm caused by family separation.

When families are investigated for situations that are poverty-related, it takes time and attention away from situations where children are truly unsafe. It also makes families afraid of asking for help in the future, and less willing to be honest about what they are going through.

Some parents, including some of us, lost jobs during child welfare investigations. This sets families back even further financially.

Kids live in families, and the best way to make sure they're safe and stable is to provide the family with support when they're struggling to make ends meet. It's time to update Maine's statute to clarify neglect of a child as willful withholding, not a lack of available resources. We also urge the Legislature to invest in policies and programs that relieve immediate financial stress for families and help them build a path forward to new economic opportunities.

At the end of the day, everyone wants to strengthen the family unit. Instead of sending families who are living in poverty into the child welfare system, we should be surrounding them with community resources and care. Because you don't have to report a family to support a family.

Thank you for your time and consideration.