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Testimony of the Choose Office
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In support of LD 1406, *An Act to Amend Certain Definitions in the Child and Family Services and Child Protection Act*

Sponsor: Representative Meyer
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 support of LD 1406, *An Act to Amend Certain Definitions in the Child and Family Services and Child Protection Act*.

This bill proposes changes to the statutory definitions of abuse or neglect and jeopardy to health or welfare in the Child and Family Services and Child Protection Act. In both definitions this bill modifies the language regarding deprivation of necessities to require that such deprivation only qualifies as abuse or neglect or jeopardy if the person responsible for the child is financially able to provide for those needs or is offered (and does not avail themselves of) reasonable financial means of support. This change is intended to differentiate between family circumstances due to poverty and family circumstances which are abusive or neglectful.

OCFS has had the opportunity to participate in the work done among community advocates and providers to develop this bill. This work was supported by Casey Family Programs and was one part of broader work underway to improve training and knowledge among mandated reporters. As part of these efforts, a workgroup spent several hours reviewing multiple revisions of draft language. The work was informed and supported by significant input from mandated reporters, including child welfare staff and other providers.

OCFS strongly supports efforts to better differentiate between family circumstances due to poverty and family circumstances which are abusive or neglectful. OCFS believes that the proposed change to the definitions in this bill will serve as one prong to a multi-pronged approach to improve overall understanding of the role of the Department and reporting of suspected abuse and neglect to the Department, enhancing community and provider response to concerning child circumstances driven by poverty, and improving the experience of families who are in need of support.

OCFS urges you to support LD 1406.

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.