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Mayo Hospital
Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Northern Light Pharmacy
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

LD 1406 An Act to Amend Certain Definitions in the Child and Family Services and Child Protection Act
Testimony in Support with Recommendation
April 8, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am speaking today on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations in support this bill. Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, 8 nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with more than 10,000 employees statewide.

This bill essentially excludes poverty from the definition of child abuse and neglect in state law. This change is consistent with the evolution of child welfare programs in several other states. We should not be removing children from their homes and families due to poverty. Instead, we should endorse programs that support families, providing them with resources and services that allow them to care for and meet the needs of their children in their homes. We support this change.

We do have concern, however, with the striking of "or lack of protection from these" on page 1, line 16. Today, the law is clear that failure by a person responsible for a child to protect that child from physical, mental, or emotional injury or impairment or sexual abuse or exploitation constitutes abuse or neglect. We think this is an important standard that should be retained in the law. During the numerous briefings on child protection cases that have been publicly discussed before this committee and others, there were clearly situations where the parents were unable or unwilling to identify which people were safe to be around the children in question and which people were not. The result of this deficit in caregiver protective capacity is that children are, at a minimum, continually exposed to unsafe individuals, and at a maximum, continually victimized with varying degrees of severity, up to and including fatal child maltreatment. The law should be clear that a parent's responsibility to keep their child safe is not limited just to the absence of perpetration of physical, mental, emotional or sexual abuse, but that their responsibility also includes the duty to protect their children from such abuse or threats of abuse perpetrated or presented by others.

We therefore ask that the Committee consider amending the bill to retain "or lack of protection from these" on page 1, line 16. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislation.