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Testimony of Rep. Lori K. Gramlich presenting
**LD 1618, Resolve, to Study the Feasibility of Establishing a
Dedicated Family Court in Maine**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and esteemed colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, I am Lori Gramlich. I have the honor and privilege of representing House District 131, the lovely seaside community of Old Orchard Beach, and of serving as Assistant House Majority Leader. I am here to present ***LD 1618, Resolve, to Study the Feasibility of Establishing a Dedicated Family Court in Maine.***

As I am sure that many of you are well aware, family court is not just another branch of the judiciary—it is often the first, and sometimes the only, court experience for families in crisis. These cases involve some of the most sensitive and high-stakes issues: child custody, protection from abuse, divorce, parental rights, and child welfare. And yet, under our current system, these deeply complex cases are often handled in a generalized court environment that lacks the specialization, consistency, and trauma-informed approach these situations demand.

LD 1618 would establish a study group on the feasibility of establishing a dedicated Family Court in Maine. Before I get into the merits of this bill, I wanted to provide you with some background about how I came to submit this bill in the first place.

Last summer, I was contacted by a constituent who had a complicated problem regarding a family matter. He had, at the time, a three-year-old son who was residing with his mother, who was preventing my constituent from seeing their son. She had alleged a number of untrue and unsubstantiated abuse claims against dad, which further complicated this family matter. Due to the abuse allegations, dad was not able to see his son.

Every single time the dad went to court, mom would ask for a continuance or other proceedings, which left the judge they had seen for any particular court date having to reschedule their child

custody hearing. Every time they went to court, a new judge ended up with the case, so dad would have to start all over again, getting a new judge conversant with his situation. He in fact has seen five different judges to date. This situation continued into the fall and winter – all the while, my constituent was not able to see his son, nor were his parents, the child’s grandparents, able to see their grandchild, and importantly, this child was not able to see his father. In fact, this child went nearly six months without seeing his father. For any child, six months is too long, but it is even more significant for a three-year-old child.

My constituent believes, and I have to agree, that if he were able to have a consistent judge reviewing his case, the timeframe for which he was separated from his child would have been diminished.

While trying to assist this family, I spoke with several attorneys, guardians ad litem and social work colleagues to try to reach a positive outcome. What I heard consistently was that, if Maine had a Dedicated Family Court like other states have, families would have a better chance of being served in a more efficient manner, and my constituent would have a better chance of being able to see his son. I also learned, from talking to colleagues in our judicial branch, that simply submitting legislation to direct that a dedicated family court be established may not be the most prudent approach. Thus, after careful consideration, I submitted the bill before you today, LD 1618.

This study is a necessary and prudent step toward ensuring that families in Maine are met with a system designed to support them with compassion, expertise and efficiency. By examining best practices in other states, assessing the burden on our current court system and identifying the potential benefits of specialization, this study group will provide invaluable insights into whether a dedicated family court could improve access to justice, reduce delays and produce more stable and equitable outcomes for children and families.

Key reasons I urge you to support this resolve include:

Consistency and Specialization: Family cases are often handled by multiple judges, leading to inconsistent rulings and fragmented decision-making. A dedicated court could allow for more continuity and better-informed judgments.

Improved Outcomes for Children: Timely and stable resolutions in custody and child welfare cases directly impact the well-being of children. Specialized courts can streamline these decisions with child-centered practices.

Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness: Delays in family cases increase emotional strain and financial burdens for litigants. Reducing backlog through a focused docket could lower system-wide costs and improve access to justice.

Support for Vulnerable Populations: Survivors of domestic violence and individuals navigating complex family law issues deserve a court system that is equipped to understand their unique circumstances and needs.

This is not a call to build something tomorrow—it is a thoughtful, deliberate step to explore whether Maine can better serve its families through a dedicated family court system. The emergency nature of this resolve is also justified, given the time-sensitive nature of legislative study processes and the urgency of the issues at stake for thousands of Maine families.

In closing, I would like to draw your attention to a report from the Maine Family Law Advisory Commission, attached to my testimony, which further outlines the benefit of having a study to ascertain the feasibility of having a dedicated family court in Maine.

I respectfully urge you to support this resolve so we can take the necessary steps toward a more just, efficient and compassionate family court system in Maine. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to try to answer any questions.