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Testimony of Representative Michele Meyer presenting
LD 2105, An Act to Update Maine's Mandated Reporting Laws
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Ingwersen and fellow members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, as you know, I am Representative Michele Meyer, and I am honored to serve as House Chair of this committee. I stand before you today to present LD 2105, An Act to Update Maine's Mandated Reporting Laws.

This committee has placed no higher priority than on the health, well-being and safety of our state's youngest citizens, our children.

The well-being of Maine children must be anchored in and surrounded by a strong network of support and systems that children and their families can turn to, that makes families and communities stronger, and that can identify what circumstances may exist in a home that threaten the health and safety of a child and rise to the level of the need for a child welfare agency intervention.

National and state survey information reveal that many mandated reporters are making reports due to concerns about liability, assumptions about families, and a lack of understanding about what the child welfare agency can provide—not because they suspect abuse or neglect. In fact, 2024 data shows that 90% of all reports did not result in findings of abuse or neglect.

Our current mandated reporting process can be confusing and challenging for both mandated reporters and child welfare staff.

Changes in LD 2105 will streamline reporting requirements, increase training, and provide more clarity on who, in what circumstances and on what timeline reporting is required. This includes removing the specific list of professional types who are mandated; removing the penalty for

failure to report; establishing a timeline for reporting; establishing that the person with firsthand information makes the report; shifting responsibility for reporting as appropriate to DA offices; and increasing the frequency of the core training.

These recommended changes came about through the work of the Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan and a mandated reporting initiative that arose from it. OCFS and the Maine Child Welfare Action Network have been leading that work, supporting engagement and input from mandated reporters, community partners, parents, and child welfare staff. Their work together has developed a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities to strengthen Maine's systems of mandated reporting and community support for families. Last session, that work led to legislation we passed to clarify that poverty is not neglect. This session, their work has yielded the thoughtful changes being proposed in this bill.

These changes reflect a robust process to consider data, gather perspectives, and provide feedback to inform the development of this legislation. It reflects the voices and engagement of many interested parties and impacted individuals.

It aligns with a national movement to acknowledge the impact of liability and complexity of policy and practice on mandated reporters, and the impact of reporting on families. Collectively, these changes would move Maine in the right direction toward improving our state's mandated reporting process for mandated reporters, for the child welfare agency, and for the safety and well-being of Maine children and families.

I have participated in a number of stakeholder meetings on various aspects of this legislation. My plan is to continue to consider concerns and recommendations I've heard as well as those offered here today and to return with amended language as necessary to ensure this legislation reflects a commitment held by this committee to keeping children safe and to keeping families strong.

Changes to Maine's mandated reporting system must ensure that those charged with this critical responsibility are provided with the training, support, and system that works as intended in promoting accurate identification and reporting of suspected abuse of neglect and to support understanding the difference and how to best support children and their families with challenges when it is not child abuse and neglect.

I hope you will join me in supporting this legislation. Thank you.