

Janet T. Mills
Governor

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Commissioner



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May 10, 2021

Senator Susan Deschambault, Chair
Representative Charlotte Warren, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 1408– An Act To Increase the Protection of Children from Domestic Abuse and Violence

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

This letter is to provide you with information regarding OCFS' support of LD 1408, An Act To Increase the Protection of Children from Domestic Abuse and Violence. This bill would elevate the crime of domestic violence assault to domestic violence aggravated assault if the act of violence was committed in the presence of a child under 14 years of age.

Due to the nature of our work, OCFS is acutely aware of the significant impact of domestic violence in the lives of Maine's children. In 2019, domestic violence was a factor in 10% of all investigations completed by the Department. This represents over 1,100 investigations involving domestic violence that year. There is empirical research that indicates exposure to violence (including domestic violence) early in life has an adverse effect on a child's brain development that can have long-lasting implications. OCFS believes that elevating the severity of the crime if a child is present is appropriate given the significant impact that may result for the child.

OCFS' only suggestion to the Committee would be to consider the evidence regarding the impact of domestic violence on the development of older children and youth and determine whether 14 is the appropriate age cutoff for elevating the severity of the crime.

We wanted to make you aware of our support for this bill and encourage your vote to pass LD 1408. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Todd A. Landry".

Dr. Todd A. Landry
Director, Office of Child and Family Services