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March 8, 2022

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 756 – *An Act Regarding Criminal Services for Juveniles*

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 LD 756, *An Act Regarding Criminal Services for Juveniles*. We regret that this letter was not available prior to the public hearing. Unfortunately, OCFS was not aware of the development of an amendment until just before the hearing and we were unable to appropriately consider and respond to the proposal in time.

LD 756 would make a General Fund appropriation of \$7 million to be shared between the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Department of Education (DOE), and Department of Labor (DOL) to expand services for children and juveniles, as well as making an additional General Fund appropriation of \$4 million to DHHS to expand housing for children and juveniles as well as their caregivers. This appropriation would be directed towards various forms of housing, including host homes.

The Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) is opposed to this bill as currently drafted. While LD 756 proposes several initiatives, this letter will focus on those pieces of the bill that would impact OCFS. OCFS has concerns about the ambiguity of language in the bill. There is a concerning lack of clarity in how funding would be divided and used among DHHS, DOE, and DOL. The bill also does not place any conditions on the services that would be funded with this appropriation, for example, requiring that they be evidence-based. The bill does not parse through how the services outlined in the bill would be dovetailed with existing services and resources. From OCFS' perspective this is particularly concerning given that crisis services and mental health services are already funded under MaineCare and OCFS dedicates additional funding to peer and family support services through contracted providers.

In the area of Children's Behavioral Health, OCFS continues to work with stakeholders to implement its plan for system improvement, which includes specific focus on evidence-based services that have been demonstrated to have a positive impact on children and families when delivered to fidelity. OCFS is also dedicating resources to expanding accessibility of services. In OCFS' experience it is not solely lack of funding which drives issues families and youth may have with accessibility, particularly to MaineCare funded services, but is also impacted by a need

for additional service providers which the Department is seeking to address by working closely with stakeholders to address workforce challenges.

OCFS is also collaborating with stakeholders, including the Department of Corrections (DOC), to ensure an appropriate continuum of care of Children's Behavioral Health Services. Reference is made to [OCFS' 2021 Annual Report on Children's Behavioral Health Services](#) for additional context and information on the extensive efforts that have been made and are continuing. OCFS would advocate for continued work to expand the accessibility of services on this continuum and while funding to expand services may be of benefit, it is not the only barrier as OCFS seeks to ensure accessibility of services at all levels of care.

In addition, OCFS has concerns with the allocation of \$4 million to DHHS to "expand housing" for children, juveniles, and their caregivers. DHHS does not have expertise in housing and works in close collaboration with Maine State Housing (MSH) on housing-related initiatives (for example, housing support for children aging out of state custody, where MSH handles the housing component and OCFS provides support for these young adults). The section allocating \$4 million also mentions "host homes", which OCFS does not support due to the lack of structure around this model. Specifically, the inability to ensure the home is a safe place for the youth through background checks, training of adults in the home to address youth behaviors and meet their needs, etc.

OCFS appreciates your consideration of these concerns as you consider LD 756.

Sincerely,

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

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