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Testimony of  
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Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

LD 699 – An Act To Create a Kinship Care Navigator Program within the Department of Health and Human Services

Hearing Date: March 16, 2021

Good Morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Todd Landry, Director of the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) within the Department of Health and Human Services and I am here today to testify in opposition to LD 699, An Act To Create a Kinship Care Navigator Program within the Department of Health and Human Services. This bill would establish within the Department a kinship care navigator to provide resources and information to persons providing kinship care to children.

OCFS believes this bill to be unnecessary as we currently fund kinship services through a contract with Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine (AFFM). In Federal Fiscal year 2020, OCFS was awarded a federal grant for a kinship navigator program. Funding runs from 10/1/2019 to 9/30/2021 with a total grant award of just over \$225,000. AFFM is an organization with significant experience delivering services and support to foster and adoptive families and the kinship navigator program was awarded to them as a result of an RFP. Prior to the award of this contract AFFM had their own kinship program that was funded with donations.

More information about AFFM's kinship program is available at <https://affm.net/services/the-kinship-program/>. Through this program AFFM have provided direct support to grandparents and other relatives who take primary responsibility for the care of children who are in need of a safe and stable environment. There is no requirement that the family have child welfare involvement or otherwise be connected to AFFM in order to receive services under AFFM's kinship program. AFFM's staff of 4 kinship specialists have identified resources specific to the unique needs of this population and provide referrals, community outreach, training, and a kinship resource guide developed by AFFM.

In the last federal fiscal year AFFM has delivered kinship specific training to 258 individuals, indicating that AFFM's outreach efforts are having a meaningful impact for kinship families. That number would likely have been even higher if it weren't for the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in two trainings being cancelled until the training could be adapted to a remote

format. AFFM also provided various types of support to 340 informal (not connected with child welfare) kinship families.

OCFS does not believe that a single designated individual within the Department could have the same impact on kinship-related issues as AFFM which is a statewide organization that is widely known organization and respected. AFFM already has the framework and support for the kinship program which fits well into other programming offered by their organization.

OCFS would also point out that that the Family First Prevention Services Act allows for use of IV-E prevention funding for kinship navigator services. Unfortunately, at this time no kinship navigator programs have been approved for use of this funding within the ACF clearinghouse. OCFS continues to track programs under consideration for approval and if an evidence-based kinship program is approved OCFS will consider implementing it in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.