

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.
Commissioner



Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Child and Family Services
11 State House Station
2 Anthony Avenue
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011
Tel.: (207) 624-7900; Toll Free: (877) 680-5866
TTY: Dial 711 (Maine Relay); Fax: (207) 624-5553

March 29, 2021

Senator Ned Claxton, Chair
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 934 – An Act To Create a Family and Juvenile Mediation Program within the
Department of Health and Human Services

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

This letter is to provide you with information regarding the Office of Child and Family Services' opposition to LD 934, An Act To Create a Family and Juvenile Mediation Program within the Department of Health and Human Services. This bill proposes the creation of a family mediation resource program within the Department to support communication and conflict resolution between families and children as an alternative to mental health services or the court system.

LD 934's stated intent is, in part, to divert youth from mental health services, yet at the same time on lines 21-27 of the bill it requires the mediation program to connect the family to "applicable resources, including but not limited to community-based providers" and that the program "must provide individualized services or referrals to services based on the needs of the family." The majority of the community resources and services that are available to families in these situations include some mental health treatment or related component. To that extent, this bill and resulting mediation program seem to direct families and youth to the very services the program is intended to divert them from.

Conflict among youth and their families in the situations the bill appears to address frequently results from mental health, behavioral health, or substance use related issues, all of which would be better addressed by an array of behavioral health services for youth and families. OCFS does not believe this program represents an efficient use of state resources. Any resources that might be available would be better spent improving the availability of evidence-based services to address issues that frequently result in significant family conflict or juvenile justice involvement.

As OCFS looks ahead to Family First implementation later this year we note that there are currently no family mediation programs or services approved as evidence-based on the Family First Clearinghouse. As you have heard in other testimony, OCFS is committed to implementing and improving evidence-based services that are approved by ACF.

We wanted to make you aware of our concerns regarding this bill. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Todd A. Landry". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

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