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Sen. Chip Curry Testimony Presenting LD 1091
“An Act To Improve the Long-term Outcomes for Youth Transitioning from State Care by Raising the Upper Age Limit for Voluntary Support Eligibility”

April 6, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and Distinguished Colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Chip Curry. I am the State Senator for Senate District #11, which includes all of the rural, coastal and island communities of Waldo County.

I am pleased to present to you LD 1091, “An Act To Improve the Long-term Outcomes for Youth Transitioning from State Care by Raising the Upper Age Limit for Voluntary Support Eligibility.”

For the past eight years I have had the pleasure and honor of working with young adults who are in the care of Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services. These are amazingly diverse young people who have great personal strengths. However, the challenges facing our young people who leave care at eighteen are also great. Too often our youth are in over their heads and left unsupported for the challenges that come their way.

To remind yourself of the challenges of this time of life, you might think of your own story or possibly that of your adult child. You might recall a situation where you or your child relied on the love, emotional support or even the financial rescue of a family member. As a twenty-year-old, my challenge involved paying for utilities, a mundane adult thing, but new to me at the time. I erroneously believed that since I had not received an electric bill after many months, maybe I never would. When the power company ultimately turned off the electricity, I discovered that their address error did not change the fact that I owed far more money than I had. After an embarrassing conversation with my parents and a no-interest loan (or possibly it was gift I can’t recall), I was back on track, the crisis was managed, and I had learned an important lesson.

For those who age out of care at eighteen we expect the transition to adulthood to be far more compressed. We expect a level of self-sufficiency far greater than their similarly aged family-supported peers. With more limited networks of family and friend support, a similarly minor event to mine might have led to the loss of housing and the upending of school and work.

Currently, older youth in-care here in Maine can choose to extend their care up until age twenty-one by developing and signing a Voluntary Extended Care Agreement with DHHS. This is an individualized plan that seeks to support the youth's developmental needs, promoting independence and seeking to strengthen healthy permanent family relationships and supports. Utilizing federal funds through the CARES Act, the Department of Health and Human Services temporarily extended the eligibility of many supports to young adults up to ages twenty-six. This bill proposes to permanently extend the eligibility of youth to participate in Voluntary Extended Care up until age 23.

As I stated, these extension plans are individualized and can include several housing options to match the needs of the young adult, including traditional foster care in a family setting, various levels of supervised independent living arrangements and residential treatment centers. Likewise, these plans can include a variety of supports for education, training and employment success. Lastly, we know that family continues to be a significant human need for our young people transitioning to adulthood. These plans seek to support the young adult in strengthening healthy long-term relationships with immediate and extended family and other caring adults.

Thank you for your consideration and I'd be happy to answer any questions.