



# Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

April 13, 2021

## Testimony Support of LD 1263 “An Act To Create a Separate Department of Child and Family Services”

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and the distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Nancy Cronin and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council)<sup>1</sup>.

Maine’s children systems are fragmented. Even within the Department of Health and Human Services the overall work of assisting children can be uncoordinated. MDDC knows many children who receive multiple types of services and supports from multiple offices at DHHS. For example, consider the 3-year-old who has autism, seizure disorder, and is in foster care. That one child has interactions with Child Welfare, Behavioral Health, likely Head Start, and Children with Special Healthcare Needs. While this one child and his or her caregivers knows staff from each one of those DHHS offices, I would be surprised if each office knows that the child interacts with 3 others in the same Department. Creating a new Department where children are central to the work could mean improved coordination and that less children will get over complicated services. We are in support of that.

We have a couple suggested amendments for this bill.

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<sup>1</sup> Councils on Developmental Disabilities were created through the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) in 1970. Maine’s DD Council has been advocating for individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DD) for over 40 years. The DD Council is a federally-funded, independent organization with members from across the state, including persons with disabilities, family members, and representatives of public and private agencies which provide services and/or funding for services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

As required in federal law<sup>1</sup>, our purpose is to promote systems change to ensure that all individuals with developmental disabilities are able to live and fully participate in their communities of choice. Working in partnership with people with disabilities, parents, advocates, and policy makers, Maine’s DD Council works to promote the independence, integration, and inclusion of all people with disabilities through advocacy, capacity building, and systems change activities throughout the state of Maine and on the national level. The DD Council’s mission is **to create a Maine in which all people are valued and respected because we believe communities are stronger when everyone is included.** The Maine DD Council employs four full-time staff who are responsible for all of the internal projects, external grants, and business of the Council.

- **Under §202. Programs and services of department**
  - **1. Services for children and families.**
    - Please add a bullet for Children with Special Healthcare Needs. The Office of Children with Special Healthcare Needs under the Maternal Child Health Program is funded by Title V and currently resides under the DHHS/CDC. Children with Special Healthcare Needs ensures that children with disabilities like Neurological Disorders, Seizure Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Metabolic Disorders and Birth Defects are not forgotten. Many of these children receive nursing services or behavioral health services but only Children with Special Healthcare Needs looks at the child’s needs based on their health and well-being. In addition, Children with Special Healthcare Needs represents children who receive Mainecare and children who do not receive Mainecare. Simply put – this office looks out for all Maine Children with Special Healthcare Needs. For that matter, you might consider the entire Maternal Child Health Program. If there is going to be a Department that specializes in children and family – they should certainly be there as well.
    - Please add a bullet for Children with Developmental Disabilities. Currently children with DD fall largely under children with behavioral health. They get lost there. There are so many children with behavioral health needs that receive services like section 65 (Home and Community Treatment.) Children with DD may receive section 65 but they often receive Section 28 (Rehabilitative and Community Support.) Because children with DD are nested underneath children with behavioral health their needs must regress to such an extent that they exhibit challenging behavior. This makes no sense what-so-ever. Please consider adding separately children with developmental disabilities as a clear focus so that their needs can be met at the earliest level of intervention possible.
    - Please consider adding a bullet that specifies activities to transition youth to adulthood.
- **Under §202. Programs and services of department**
  - Please consider adding a “#4” to explicitly state the responsibility of oversight and coordinating, where appropriate, the work that will be done within the new department. I realize that may sound like an obvious activity but it has not regularly been done and I wonder if one reason is has not been an explicitly required activity. Coordinating activities should, at minimum, focus on ensuring minimal duplication of services, maximizing federal funds, and striving to provide efficient, equitable, and timely services.
  - Please consider adding a “#5” to require a bi-annual report submitted to this committee that provides an overview of unmet needs of children in Maine. These needs could be due to already known barriers or to issues that had not been previously been identified.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and I would be happy to take any questions.