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## **Testimony presented to the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services**

### **SUPPORT: LD 393**

**Presented by: MAINE CHILDREN'S TRUST**

**February 22, 2022**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Committee on Health & Human Services, my name is Pam LaHaye and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Children's Trust.

The Maine Children's Trust (MCT) was created in statute with a singular focus on child abuse and neglect prevention. As such Maine Children's Trust has supported home visiting in Maine since the 1990's through advocacy, grants and training. In 2010, the Trust assumed responsibility for providing the home visiting system supports – quality assurance, quality improvement, training, technical assistance, staff credentialing, along with data collection and reporting. The Trust has been managing the direct service contracts with the local agencies since 2016 as a no cost pass through intermediary through a contract with the Maine CDC. The Trust is home to the Parents As Teachers (PAT) State Office and we represent the Parents As Teachers National Center here in Maine.

Maine Families Home Visiting is a home-based parenting education and support program delivered statewide through a network of eleven local agencies. The program utilizes an evidence-based model, Parents As Teachers, to work with expectant families and families with new babies to promote safe home environments, healthy growth and development for babies and toddlers, and to provide key connections to needed services. All Maine Families sites are PAT Blue Ribbon Affiliates, which is a designation of high quality.

Maine Families can support any new parents who opt to participate in those challenging early months, up to capacity limitations. Longer term, ongoing services are available to those families with ongoing needs. The program served

over 1900 parents last year, most of whom are facing challenges in their lives that can impact their children's well being. Maine Families has demonstrated multiple positive outcomes for both children and their families.

New this year, Maine Families is about to begin enrolling families referred for prevention services (with OCFS' Family First Prevention Services Act funding) that have open cases with Child Protective Services as part of our contract with the Maine CDC. The eligibility for this population will expand to include services for families with children ages 3 to 5.

LD 363 proposes to expand behavioral health services for families that are in reunification and includes Parents As Teachers as one of those services. Parents As Teachers is an evidence-based primary/secondary prevention program, but is not considered to be a behavioral health program. Because the focus of this home visiting model is prevention, there has been no research or evidence-base to support efficacy on service provision for families in reunification. Family visitors are not licensed service providers that have been trained in reunification, but are well trained to provide home-based prevention services. Parents As Teachers also generally requires that both parents and children be present for visits, with some temporary exceptions.

Maine Children's Trust believes that families are best served and supported upstream, before maltreatment occurs, and recommends that increased funding through this bill be used to fund an expanded reach to serve more families with infants and toddlers through a longer initial eligibility window.