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4/25/2025

Senator Carney, Chair
Representative Kuhn, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 1618 – *Resolve, to Study the Feasibility of Establishing a Dedicated Family Court in Maine*

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, thank you for the opportunity to provide information neither for nor against LD 1618, *Resolve, to Study the Feasibility of Establishing a Dedicated Family Court in Maine*.

This bill would create a study group to research the possibility of establishing a dedicated family court in Maine, including evaluating the potential benefits and challenges, as well as the feasibility.

OCFS would like the committee to be aware that this bill, as drafted, does not contemplate the inclusion of Protective Custody (PC) cases as part of the docket for the dedicated family court system. In most states with a dedicated family law court, child welfare court cases are included as part of that court's purview. If LD 1618 were to be enacted, OCFS would want to ensure that consideration was given to whether Maine's family law court should or should not include PC cases. This would require an amendment to LD 1618 to include this consideration, as well as to include representatives of OCFS and the Office of the Attorney General's Child Protection Division as part of the study group.

Additionally, the Division of Support Enforcement and Recovery (DSER) currently serves as the conduit for approximately \$2 million annually to support the operations Maine Judicial Branch's Family Division in matters where child support is at issue. As such, a DSER representative on the study group would prove beneficial.

Many of the families that OCFS works with have had involvement with a Family Matter (FM) or may have involvement as part of the resolution of OCFS' involvement with their family. OCFS staff have experienced, via their clients, the protracted timelines for some family law matters in the Maine District Court. While LD 1618 would not directly relieve this issue, we hope that any study of a dedicated family court would provide further information about the potential to minimize delays to the greatest extent possible.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,

Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW

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Director

Office of Child and Family Services

Maine Department of Health and Human Services