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Testimony of Director Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW
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Good morning, Senator Hickman, Representative Fay, and members of the Government Oversight Committee, I am Bobbi Johnson, the Director of the Office of Child and Family Services.

As I have transitioned into the permanent role of Director of OCFS, I have spent a great deal of time thinking about and sharing my vision for our office. As that vision has coalesced, two primary priorities have emerged.

The first is addressing the needs of OCFS' staff by seeking solutions to alleviate unmanageable workloads and providing ample opportunities for me and the child welfare leadership team to hear directly from staff. I want to know where there are struggles and what solutions they may have based on their experiences. We have the opportunity together to transform the experience of working for OCFS, improving staff focus on ensuring child safety and caring for and supporting children and families. I will be undertaking an ambitious schedule of District visits through the end of January and into February and will complete these visits by the end of next month.

My second priority is seizing every opportunity to gain knowledge and insight from those with lived experience in our system, whether that be as a resource parent, service provider, a youth in care, a parent involved with child welfare, or a family member whose family has been involved in our system. As a former resource parent, I know firsthand how valuable their insight is as they see and experience our system through a different lens. That is uniquely true for each person who has experience with child welfare. As someone with many years of service within the organization, I benefit from established relationships and trust with many of those with lived experience. I'm looking forward to continuing to build relationships and strengthening our system based on the valuable insight I know these individuals bring to the table.

As my team and I implement these two priorities, we will also be conducting an organizational and management audit of child welfare. This will provide us with an objective external perspective on how we can improve our operations to better meet the needs of children and families, as suggested by some members of this Committee. Rather than focusing on child welfare policy and practice, the focus of previous and ongoing reviews, this audit will focus on the Office's structure and organization. One of the key things I have learned during my time with OCFS is not to be afraid of difficult conversations or hard problems, because they are often

where the greatest opportunity for growth and improvement are born. I believe that this outside perspective will help us build upon the honest feedback we have heard from staff and others both here in this Committee and elsewhere and develop opportunities to improve our operations.

My team and I have also dedicated significant time to reviewing the feedback provided by staff through testimony, our staff survey, in-person meetings, and other avenues. Based on that feedback, we've developed some short-term solutions that we are immediately implementing, including:

- Hiring a full-time placement coordinator to assist Districts in locating safe and appropriate family placements for children and alleviate associated administrative work previously delegated to staff.
- Continuing to conduct facilitated listening sessions with the team in our Lewiston District Office to understand their unique needs, as well as using that feedback to seek opportunities to implement improvements across all the districts.
- Developing new communication pathways for staff including a regular newsletter from OCFS' leadership team.
- Increasing our commitment to collaboration with resource parents, including next month introducing a draft of revisions to the Resource Parent Bill of Rights developed in conjunction with a group of stakeholders that included strong representation from resource and kinship families.
- Convening a workgroup of District staff to review and make recommendations for streamlining documentation, including in Katahdin.

I am also excited to announce that we are now funding local Prevention Councils, formerly known as child abuse and neglect prevention councils, to create community networks to support parents. This will complement a public education campaign to let parents know it is good to ask for help. Both are elements of the Child Safety and Family Wellbeing Plan that the Legislature funded in the biennial budget.

The theme of my priorities and the strategies we are undertaking is people. Our greatest strength as an organization is the passionate individuals who have dedicated their lives to helping children and families, whether as an employee of OCFS, a resource parent, or a service provider. I want to celebrate their commitment and make our child welfare system one that they are proud to be a part of and that results in the best possible outcomes for children and families.