



SEN. CRAIG V. HICKMAN, SENATE CHAIR  
REP. JESSICA FAY, HOUSE CHAIR

MEMBERS:

SEN. LISA KEIM  
SEN. MIKE TIPPING  
SEN. RICHARD BENNETT  
SEN. JILL C. DUSON  
SEN. JEFFREY TIMBERLAKE  
REP. AMY ARATA  
REP. H. SAWIN MILLETT, JR.  
REP. MARK BLIER  
REP. ANNE MARIE MASTRACCIO  
REP. MARGARET M. O'NEIL

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE  
GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

**MEETING SUMMARY**  
**February 9, 2024**

**Call to Order**

The Chair, Sen. Hickman, called the Government Oversight Committee to order at 9:35 a.m.

**ATTENDANCE**

Senators: Sen. Hickman, Senator Tipping, Sen. Duson, Sen. Timberlake,  
Sen. Keim (zoom), Sen. Bennett (zoom)

Representatives: Rep. Fay, Rep. Arata, Rep. Blier, Rep. Mastraccio, Rep. Millett,  
Rep. O'Neil (zoom)

Legislative Staff: Peter Schleck, Director, OPEGA  
Edna Cayford, HCIFS Committee Clerk

Others: Christine Alberi, Maine's Child Welfare Ombudsman  
Jeanne Lambrew, Commissioner, Department of Health and Human Services  
Bobbi Johnson, Director, Office of Child and Family Services, DHHS

## Introduction of Committee Members

The members of the Committee introduced themselves.

## New Business

(To watch this meeting - the recorded Live Stream can be viewed here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/Audio/#220>)

## Meeting Summaries

The Committee received and accepted the Meeting Summaries for the November 29, 2023, December 6, 2023 and December 13, 2023 GOC Meetings.

## Presentation by Child Welfare Ombudsman (2023 Annual Report)

Christine Alberi, Maine’s Child Welfare Ombudsman shared and presented the Ombudsman’s 2023 Annual Report to the Committee.

(A copy of this Report can be found here: <https://cwombudsman.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-Annual-Report-Maine-Child-Welfare-Ombudsman.pdf>)

(A copy of the Department’s response to the Ombudsman’s 2023 Annual Report can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/10837>)

Rep. Mastraccio asked Ms. Alberi her thoughts on the bills in the Legislature that create an Inspector General of Child Protection and to separate the Office of Child and Family Services from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Ms. Alberi answered that she was not an expert on how those things would affect the current programs but thought the discussions around them would be beneficial.

Sen. Tipping asked what changes she has seen that have improved the Department’s “deeper issues”.

Ms. Alberi mentioned changed that allow family members to be better connected within the Department programs.

Rep. Millett asked her thoughts on the Children’s Behavioral Health being moved from the Office of Child and Family Services to another part of the Department.

Ms. Alberi stated that the move better aligns with what is done nationally, and thought that it would be beneficial as it would allow the children receiving behavioral health care to continue their services into adulthood more smoothly.

Members asked about safety science, and its effectiveness to make proper decisions and the implementation of new recommendations from Casey Family Programs last fall. Ms. Alberi confirmed the usage of safety science as positive and confirmed that the Department has made changes from those outside recommendations.

Rep. Mastraccio asked about findings against parents and whether corroborating an accusation from a child is an issue due to not having findings.

Ms. Alberi stated that just because there are findings against a parent, does not necessarily protect the child and that there are some misunderstandings on the findings policy that could be clarified and that it was a bigger issue.

Sen. Keim asked about the potential request of different information and metrics from the Department to create better transparency and accountability. She also asked about the potential of a market study for Foster families.

Ms. Alberi answered that there are already a bunch of good reports that give recommendations to the Department, but it was only recently that the Department seemed to fully be implementing those. She liked the idea of market study and thought the only downside would be any potential costs.

Sen. Hickman asked about the idea of dormitories for children who may not be ready for a stable home. Ms. Alberi stated that there would be benefits of housing for children who are more troubled in family homes.

## **Committee Discussion of Data Requests**

(A copy of the Department letter re: Children's Behavioral Health changes can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/10757>)

The Committee invited Director Bobbi Johnson from the Office of Child and Family Services to join the Committee.

(A copy of the Department letter re: Data Requests on hoteling can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/10756>)

Rep. Fay asked about the implementation of new recommendations into policy and the timeline for that. Director Johnson answered that it may take an additional 6 months from information to implementation with research in between.

Members asked about issues with call back times and problems with receiving money from the Department for foster children, both to the families and toward child care facilities.

Rep. Arata stated that she thought the Department's responses recently have better tone than in the past and thought it was a positive signal to a more collaborative direction.

Sen. Keim asked about the expansion of services and asked the Department to elaborate.

Director Johnson answered that in the beginning the services were only available in a small number of districts but they keep improving and expanding to more districts.

***The Committee took a lunch break and reconvened at 12:20 PM.***

## **Committee Consideration of Draft Final Committee Report:**

The Committee discussed feedback and edits for their draft report titled "Frontline Perspectives in Child Protection as Catalysts for Reform."

(A copy of the Committee's Draft Report can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/10838>)

The Committee's discussion included how to organize their Report's recommendations by consensus level, and addressing specific legislative ideas related to the Department of Health and Human Services, such as transitional housing for children. The committee members expressed various opinions on how to best present their recommendations and whether additional legislation is needed or already covered by existing bills.

Members confirmed some edits with Director Schleck to be finalized and presented for the next meeting.

## **Next GOC meeting date and planning**

The Committee will prepare for future work, including reviewing the presentation of the OPEGA Report titled Child Protective Services Reunification: Information Brief.

The meeting concluded with plans for presenting a revised report draft and a decision to not draft new legislation from the committee but leave individual members to propose amendments to their bills.

## **Adjourn**

Rep. Fay adjourned the Government Oversight Committee meeting at 12:20 on a motion by Sen. Hickman seconded by Rep. Fay.