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January 6, 2022

Senator Ned Claxton, Chair
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 699 – An Act To Create a Kinship Care Navigator Program within the Department of Health and Human Services

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

On June 15, 2021, you sent a letter to the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) requesting an update on the Department's ongoing efforts related to kinship families. This letter serves as that update.

Policy

OCFS has a standard procedure for the development of new policies. Over the last few months OCFS' Policy Coordinator has been working with a group of internal and external stakeholders on a new policy entitled, "LGBTQI+ Policy." Among the stakeholders are Mary Bonauto of GLAD and Brandy Brown, who is the Gender Clinic Coordinator at the Barbara Bush Hospital/Maine Medical Center. There is currently a draft of the policy which has received extensive input from stakeholders and the goal is to finalize the policy in early 2022.

Additionally, the Associate Director of Child Welfare Services, Attorney Bonauto, and Ms. Brown are scheduled to meet in January to discuss the concerns raised at the public hearing on LD 699 and other issues related to the experience of youth in state custody.

Kinship Efforts

As we discussed in testimony on LD 699, OCFS currently funds kinship services through a contract with Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine (AFFM). This program is funded using a federal grant for kinship navigator services. AFFM has established a [Kinship Program](#) that provides direct support to grandparents and other relatives who are caring for relative children. The program is staffed by 4 kinship specialists and run by Bette Hoxie. Ms. Hoxie has connected with Attorney Bonauto regarding the Kinship Program and providing direct outreach to underserved communities and youth statewide, including LGBTQI+ homeless youth.

AFFM currently works with Maine Family Planning to offer training to all resource families, including kinship families. The training focuses on how to promote healthy relationships and

opens the door for communication with LGBTQI+ youth by providing basic language and definitions and resource to access for support. Maine Family Planning has been a strong partner in this work, paying for a venue, providing meals during the training, and in some cases paying for overnight stays for families so they can attend the training. In the past AFFM has also worked with the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT) to provide presentations to resource families.

AFFM also has several parents who are members of the LGBTQI+ community who serve as resource parent mentors. All AFFM staff have received training on equity and inclusion.

AFFM and OCFS continue to participate in a Kinship Navigator Collaborative with Casey Family Programs and colleagues in other states, including Montana, Vermont, and Wyoming, to develop an evidence-based kinship navigator program for submission to the Federal Family First Clearinghouse. This group has developed a model, agreed upon data points to collect, surveyed families, and gathered basic demographics. Maine will be implementing the pilot model in select counties beginning in February of 2022 and collecting data through December 2024. The pilot service is based on a case management model and the outcomes in the pilot counties will be compared to those in counties where kinship families receive the current kinship support services.

There is currently only one kinship navigator program that has been established as eligible for funding through the Family First Prevention Services Act. At this time the rating for this program is “promising.” OCFS is hopeful that its efforts in collaboration with AFFM, Casey Family Programs, and other states will result in the establishment of an additional program that is considered “well supported.” Per the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse, “promising” services have at least one contrast in a study that achieves a rating of moderate or high on study design and execution and demonstrates a favorable effect on a target outcome. “Well-supported” services have at least two contrasts with non-overlapping samples that achieve a rating of moderate or high design and execution and these studies demonstrate favorable effects in a target outcome domain with at least one of the target outcomes showing sustained favorable effect for at least 12 months following the end of the service.

AFFM’s Board of Directors is serving as the oversight committee for the collaborative project. AFFM has a diverse Board of Directors that includes former youth in care, a member of a tribal community, a current tribal judge, an attorney, kinship families, foster/resource parents, adoptive parents, and community members. There is also representation from faith based and LGBTQI+ populations. AFFM has asked Attorney Bonauto to propose a member of GLAD to serve on the Board. There is also a small group working directly on pilot implementation, which includes one staff person from AFFM, OCFS’ Regional Associate Director who oversees resource parent services, and two researchers from the University of Maine at Orono who are assisting with data collection and analysis.

During 2021, OCFS held resource parent town hall calls quarterly with all resource families (including kinship families) invited to attend. These events have provided OCFS with valuable information regarding the experiences and needs of families statewide and have also provided families with the opportunity to voice concerns and ask questions. In addition, 429 resource

parents participated in an April 2021 survey to collect information regarding services and supports for resource parents in Maine. Ninety- six (96) of those participants were kinship resource parents.

In February and March of 2021, OCFS convened six focus groups with resource parents (including kinship families) where OCFS gathered feedback about the supports and services provided by the Resource Parent Care Team, AFFM, and mental and behavioral health providers providing treatment to children in state custody. An additional two calls were convened in December 2021. This input has allowed OCFS to further refine services to meet the needs of this population.

In December 2021, OCFS' Resource Parent Program Manager, Rebecca Beal, contacted kinship parents to request feedback regarding their specific needs. OCFS Resource Supervisors and Maine's treatment foster care agencies (Aroostook Mental Health Center, Community Health and Counseling Services, Community Care, KidsPeace, Woodfords Family Services, and Spurwink) provided the names of kinship families they believed would be available and could offer valuable information. A total of 13 families provided feedback regarding their experiences.

OCFS is committed to ensuring that a comprehensive array of services are available to all resource parents and the children in their care. We look forward to our continued work with Casey Family Programs and the multi-state collaborative to develop an evidence-based kinship program for families and proud of the work currently underway to support kinship families and understand their unique needs. OCFS will continue efforts to ensure that staff, contractors, and resource parents understand the specific needs of LGBTQI+ youth and looks forward to ongoing conversations with Attorney Bonauto, Ms. Brown, and others in order to ensure all youth are provided with the support and services needed to thrive.

Regards,

Dr. Todd A. Landry
Director, Office of Child and Family Services

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STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTIETH LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

June 15, 2021

Todd A. Landry, Director
 Office of Child and Family Services
 Department of Health and Human Services
 11 State House Station
 Augusta, ME 04333-0011

Dear Director Landry,

The Health and Human Services Committee recently considered [LD 699](#), An Act To Create a Kinship Care Navigator Program within the Department of Health and Human Services. The committee voted “ought not to pass” based on the work the Department is engaging in with the Casey Family Program site evaluation group. We request that, to the extent possible, a representative of GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD) participate in the workgroup with the Casey Family Program. We also request that the Department meet with a representative of GLAD to discuss their [testimony](#) and [additional information](#) provided in the Committee’s consideration of LD 699. We suggest that the Department incorporate GLAD’s suggestions in their work with Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine (AFFM) and other Department activities related to kinship.

Additionally, there are grandparents who have asked to increase opportunities to have their voices heard regarding kinship. We request that the Department include in its kinship work grandparents who are providing kinship care. They are an underserved community who provide a safety net to their grandchildren when the biological parents are unable to do so.

The Committee requests that, no later than January 15, 2022, the Department provide an update on the kinship evaluation work with the Casey Family Program, including an update on GLAD’s involvement in the process, and additional work relating to kinship families that the Department has undertaken. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Sen. Ned Claxton
 Senate Chair

Rep. Michele Meyer
 House Chair

cc: Health and Human Services Committee members
 Jeanne M. Lambrew, Commissioner, Department of Health and Human Services
 Molly Bogart, Government Relations Director, Department of Health and Human Services
 Mary Bonauto, Esq., GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders
 Travis Bryant, Executive Director, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine