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

April 11, 2022

Dr. Todd 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,

We are writing to request information from your office to share at a June meeting of the Health and Human Services Committee. As you know, the Committee recently worked and voted unanimously LD 1853, Resolve, To Increase Oversight of the Child Welfare System (now Resolve 2021, chapter 142). This resolve requires quarterly reporting on a number of topics, at a minimum, that are outlined in the resolve. We have a number of additional information requests.

1. We have heard that there is work going on within the department to bolster the number of caseworkers and remove certain tasks from their workload to allow them to concentrate on their core task of ensuring the safety of children. We have several questions around these efforts:
 - Has OCFS been able to remove certain tasks, particularly including legal tasks, from the workload of caseworkers? Who is now doing these tasks?
 - How is OCFS working to fill current caseworker vacancies? We understand that the budget includes additional weekend and overnight positions.
 - Has OCFS considered a career ladder approach to caseworkers with a lower standard of qualifications or experience for entry level caseworkers?
 - Are plans to have a 50% caseload for new caseworkers in process? Has this been used in the past and has there been success? How is “success” measured?
 - Has OCFS extended the 35-day time frame for investigations, or does it intend to? The survey of caseworkers and supervisors conducted by the Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA) shows clearly that a majority of both caseworkers and supervisors do not consider the time frame to be realistic.
2. What is OCFS doing to improve quality assurance? How are workers at all levels involved in quality assurance case reviews?
3. Intake workers used the Structured Decision-Making tool to screen reports to determine responses in terms of requiring investigation, not appropriate for investigation or requiring special responses, as well as whether a 24-hour or 72-hour response is appropriate. How

often is a recommendation from the SDM tool overridden? Who determines when that should occur – caseworker, supervisor or other level?

4. How is OCFS using the data and information from the survey of caseworkers and supervisors to improve performance, morale, and safety of children?
5. Are there plans to survey the cohort of new caseworkers completing the Foundations training conducted by the Cutler Institute at USM? How will you determine success of the new training?
6. Caseworkers, supervisors, and assistant attorneys general all face challenges in accessing important and required information from medical providers and substance use disorder treatment and mental health providers. OCFS is currently convening multi-disciplinary workgroups with stakeholders to develop protocols and agreements around information sharing. What is the status of that work and the effort to create protocols and agreements?
7. What is being done to improve communication between offices in DHHS and between DHHS and other executive departments with respect to child safety and welfare?
8. How is Katahdin helping caseworkers and supervisors do their work? Are there ways in which the system creates barriers for caseworkers and supervisors?

We appreciate your cooperation as our Committee works on this very important topic. We all share in the goal of promoting the safety and wellbeing of children and families. We will let you know the date and format of our June meeting as soon as that has been determined.

Sincerely,



Sen. Ned Claxton
Senate Chair



Rep. Michele Meyer
House Chair



Sen. Marianne Moore
Senate Lead



Rep. Kathy Javner
House Minority Lead

cc: Health and Human Services Committee, members
Government Oversight Committee, members
Lucia Nixon, Director, Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability
Molly Bogart, Director of Governmental Affairs, DHHS