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Testimony of Commissioner Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.  
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Before the Joint Standing Committee on Government Oversight

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Senator Hickman, Representative Fay, and honorable members of the Government Oversight Committee. My name is Jeanne Lambrew, and I am Commissioner of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. Thank you for allowing me to speak for a few minutes about the recently announced changes before turning it over to my colleague.

I would like to introduce Bobbi Johnson – not because she is new to you, but to explain why, with the Governor's support, I appointed her to the position of Director of the Office of Child and Family Services, or OCFS.

First, Bobbi knows the work. For nearly three decades, she has been a child welfare caseworker, supervisor, and director. She has witnessed the changes in policy and practices, knows federal and state law, and understands first-hand what it takes to support children and families. She has served as a kinship caregiver to a relative herself. When I spoke to child welfare workers about the qualities, they sought in their next leader, they recommended someone who knows first-hand about working with families in distress and could hit the ground running.

Second, in the last few months, as we have been facing increased challenges in the child welfare system, she has shared my sense of urgency about the importance of strengthening our team and partnerships and making needed changes.

And, third, Director Johnson brings to the position hope: she sees the excellence in the hard working staff at OCFS and appreciates the potential for improvement. She has witnessed what success looks like:

- A family that, with help, remains safely intact.
- A child who finds a loving permanent home.
- A former foster child who gives back by coaching kids still in the system.
- And an adult whose life is enriched through fostering or adoption.

This is why people become child welfare professionals.

And this is why Bobbi Johnson is the right person at this time for this job.

I also would like to say a few words about the reorganization we announced last week. We will transition Children's Behavioral Health Services from OCFS to the Office of Behavioral Health or OBH. This reorganization more closely connects children's behavioral health with the continuum of behavioral health services in Maine and promotes an integrated, whole-family approach to care.

Moving these roughly 40 positions from OCFS to OBH, which currently has fewer than 100 positions, better balances staff across Offices. This will enable leadership in both Offices to increase support for and better incorporate feedback from staff in these service areas.

For OCFS, this move allows the Director to increase her focus on the complex work of child welfare, along with child care.

This move will proceed in two steps.

First, the Associate Director for Children's Behavioral Health Services will report to the Director of OBH, effective this week. This allows leadership of affected programs to immediately attend to time-sensitive activities.

Second, leadership at the Department and in the Offices will work with staff on a transition. The transition allows staff, partner, and client voices to be heard; services to remain connected as changes are made; and movements of positions, funding, and accountability to be smooth. The transition should be completed by June 2024, which as you know does not impede in any way legislative considerations during the short session.

I am happy to answer any questions, but first wanted to let Director Johnson discuss her immediate plans and the management audit.