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MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE
GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Date: November 14, 2024

To: Members, Government Oversight Committee

From: The Honorable Craig V. Hickman, Senate Chair
The Honorable Jessica L. Fay, House Chair

Handwritten signatures of Craig V. Hickman and Jessica L. Fay.

RE: Committee Consideration of Continuation of Child Protection Work

As we end our work together as a Committee, we would like to take stock of what we have done and the work that remains in the realm of Child Protection.

Indeed, the Committee has conducted our own extensive work, which culminated in the report “Frontline Perspectives in Child Protection as Catalysts for Reform” in February of this year.¹

And, over our two sessions of the 131st Legislature, we have received from OPEGA an Information Brief on Child Protective Services Reunification Processes² and Four (4) Case File Review Reports, concerning the deaths of 1. Hailey Goding, 2. Maddox Williams, 3. Jaden Harding, and 4. Sylus Melvin.³ The most recent report, concerning Sylus Melvin, we heard presented on September 18, 2024, and we received Public Comment on October 16, 2024.

This leaves us today, at our last meeting, with the consideration and communication of next steps. This Committee is still awaiting the decision of the Law Court that may let us better understand OPEGA’s reports and the facts of the individual cases, in Executive Session. To that end, it seems prudent and wise to continue to hold off on any Work Sessions and any votes to endorse, endorse in part, or not endorse, these reports.

The Chairs suggest that we, as a Committee discuss today how we might want to package and transmit this work along to the 132nd GOC, along with our recommendations regarding what some next steps may be. We could choose to do this in the form of a letter, as we have done at times for tax expenditure reviews and other matters. The goal would be to urge that this work carries on, recognizing that we are not in the place today to bring it to a definitive conclusion.

¹ <https://legislature.maine.gov/backend/app/services/getDocument.aspx?documentId=107569>

² <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/10785>

³ Hailey Goding <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/9715>

Maddox Williams <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/9997>

Jaden Harding <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/10422>

Sylus Melvin https://legislature.maine.gov/uploads/visual_edit/rr-cfrsm-22-opega-final-report-3.pdf

A potential menu of options for consideration in sharing with the next Government Oversight Committee is suggested as follows:

Items to Include in a Committee Letter:

- A link to the Committee’s “Frontline Perspectives” Report (which includes links to meeting recordings, meeting summaries, and public testimony); and
- Links to the five OPEGA work products referenced above and related public testimony, meeting summaries, and meeting recordings.

Potential Committee Recommendations:

- Recommend that the 132nd Committee request updates on DHHS progress in implementation of Committee and OPEGA recommendations concerning Child Protection; and
- Recommend that once the Law Court issues a decision in GOC v. DHHS, the 132nd GOC should take up whether the Case File Reviews should be endorsed, endorsed in part, or not endorsed, following a Work Session or Work Sessions. Consistent with prior Committee practice, when deemed necessary⁴, the 132nd GOC can and should consider publishing Committee Addendums to be posted online alongside the OPEGA Reports, to reflect any distinct Committee perspectives on the reports.

⁴ See Government Oversight Committee Addendum to OPEGA’s Information Brief on State Funding for Good Will-Hinckley (January 2016) <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/944>