



MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0003

January 22, 2026

The Honorable Craig Hickman, Chair
The Honorable Anne-Marie Mastraccio, Chair
C/O Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability.
82 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Chair Hickman, Chair Mastraccio, and committee members:

I write today to formally request an expansion of a previously approved investigation into the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) involvement in the deaths of Christopher and Ty Hunnewell, both of whom were killed in Chelsea by a juvenile in the custody of the Department's Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) division.

Two deaths involving children have occurred in Penobscot County within a month of each other. The first, which is detailed in the accompanying letter to DHHS Commissioner Sarah Gagne-Holmes dated Dec. 31, 2025, involved the family of Eleanora Ray McLaughlin, the one-year-old girl who died in Milford the previous weekend. According to media sources, the child's mother, Erika Dupuis, has been seeking answers regarding her daughter's death from DHHS.

In our letter to Commissioner Gagne-Holmes, we asked again about the deaths in Chelsea as well as the depth of involvement the Department had with Eleanora's family, the number of visits to the home that reportedly had no heat or running water, and what the Department's findings were from those visits. Her death reportedly occurred one week after OCFS closed the family's case.

Subsequently, we learned this week of another child in the nearby Penobscot County community of Orrington who was reportedly killed by her father. The girl, Lyla Samuel, was just 12 weeks old and her father has since been arrested for her murder. Sources have indicated that DHHS may have been involved with this family as well.

A thorough investigation by OPEGA will provide clarity to the facts surrounding these two cases in addition to the ones already approved. If the review determines that critical errors were made by OCFS, which would unfortunately continue a pattern we have witnessed the past few years, the Department will need this critical information to correct course. As it stands now, it certainly appears there were materially significant shortcomings with the case in Milford that led to a dead child less than a week after the case was closed.

OPEGA is the proper venue for this review, given its mission and statutory authority to access confidential records as well as its exemption from the Freedom of Access Act. Its independence and expertise make it uniquely qualified to evaluate this sensitive matter.

The Maine Legislature has a fundamental duty to safeguard public safety and uphold the integrity of state processes. We look forward to further discussion of this request at the next meeting of the Government Oversight Committee, or perhaps hearing from the DHHS commissioner as we requested in the letter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Timberlake".

Jeff Timberlake
State Senator, District 17