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Testimony in Support of LD 1950, *An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Create a Plan to Incorporate the Probate Courts into the Judicial Branch.*

Senator Carney, Representative Harnett and Members of the Judiciary Committee I am Debby Willis, Division Chief of the Child Support Enforcement Division at the Office of the Attorney General, and I am here to speak in favor of LD 1950, *An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Create a Plan to Incorporate the Probate Courts into the Judicial Branch.*

The Office of the Attorney General offers perspective on this LD gained from the Child Support Division involvement in family matters in both the probate courts and the district courts across the state.

These sensitive and critical family matters would benefit from the efficiencies, uniformity, and support of having the probate courts incorporated into the Maine Judicial Branch. The Judicial Branch jurisdiction has been expanded recently to include guardianships and name change cases. The Family Division of District Court does a particularly superb job of handling family matters with efficiencies developed to swiftly move family matters forward and to resolution, providing stability for families and children.

Another benefit for our client agencies, families and other litigants is that the probate cases would be handled as part of a centrally administered system of justice. This would provide consistency in procedures and training, as there would be centralized staff and administration.

Today's family matters can be really challenging and complex. Families would benefit from having full time judges, who could dedicate all their time to their judicial work, and not have to maintain a private law practice or other employment. Family matters could be allocated according to the number of cases, not county lines. The Judicial Branch could apportion resources where needed throughout the state, which would help prevent delays in having cases heard and resolved.

Finally, this is a phased transfer. The judges will transfer over the course of four years. They will work in the existing probate court facilities. The county registries of probate would be

preserved. They will docket and schedule court proceedings. They will assist parties in completing probate forms and perform quasi-judicial functions in informal probate matters, something district court clerks are not authorized to do. Additional time and consideration is needed to determine how best to preserve these features.

Thank you for your time today. This is a very complex and important initiative, and I would be happy to address questions now or at a work session.