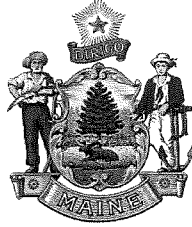


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STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

June 30, 2015

Tom Desjardin
Acting Commissioner
Maine Department of Education
23 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Newell Augur
Peter Lindsay
Maine Children's Growth Council
c/o Augur & Associates
5 Wade Street
Augusta, ME 04330

Dear Commissioner Desjardin, Mr. Augur and Mr. Lindsay:

On April 28, 2015, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs (the "Committee") held a public hearing on LD 1118, a Resolve to Establish the Study Commission on the Social Emotional Learning and Development of Maine's Young Children, and on May 7 the Committee held a work session on the bill. At the public hearing and work session we received testimony that the Department of Education, with the Department of Health and Human Services (together, the "Department") and the Maine Children's Growth Council could pursue the objectives of this bill without enacting legislation. Accordingly, we write to formally request your cooperation in achieving those objectives.

The Committee respectfully requests that the Department and the Maine Children's Growth Council collaborate to establish an ad hoc committee to examine the social emotional learning and development of Maine's young children. The ad hoc committee should include, but not be limited to, representation from the Department; the Maine Children's Growth Council; organizations that promote child welfare, children's mental health and early childhood advocacy; persons with experience in Medicaid benefits; a pediatrician; and a representative of the child care industry.

The Committee finds that there is an increase in children's challenging behavior, which may be leading to a corresponding increase in expulsions and other requests that children leave the classroom without an attempt to address the behavioral issues or find support for placement in another appropriate setting. This is a national problem that has elicited a joint statement from the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services regarding expulsion in preschool programs; it is important that Maine take a closer look at the causes and possible remedies to this problem.

We request that the ad hoc committee gather data related to the voluntary and involuntary dismissal and exclusionary discipline practices with regard to young children through grade two; gather information regarding practices and procedures available to educators and staff for professional development; and gather information regarding classroom supports available to educators for addressing children's behavioral needs. This work should include general information regarding existing law and policy directly related to the social and emotional growth and behavioral needs of young children. We further request that the ad hoc committee review the data and information gathered to specifically examine the following:

1. Parent or caregiver education that promotes young children's social emotional learning and teaches effective responses to behavioral challenges;
2. Appropriate training and preparation for early childhood educators and staff to support children in social and emotional development;
3. The current level of educator and support staff competencies in addressing children's behavioral needs without using exclusionary discipline practices;
4. Currently available evidence-based intervention techniques available to educators and staff for addressing children's behavior needs;
5. Methods of implementing collaborative practices among early childhood services providers and public school educators and staff; and
6. The extent to which there are regional differences in demographics that affect the incidence of voluntary or involuntary dismissals in the statewide population.

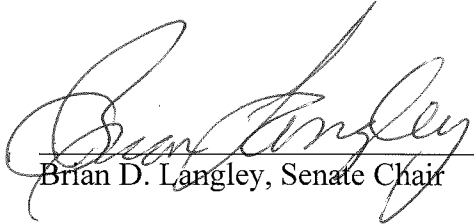
The Committee also requests that the ad hoc committee consider making recommendations regarding training for early childhood educators and staff to support and teach young children skills for healthy social emotional learning and development; techniques and approaches that prevent expulsion, suspension and other exclusionary discipline practices; changes in the preparation of early childhood educators that facilitate an understanding of how to teach children social emotional skills and the management of behaviors; methods and guidelines for the ongoing collection of data to monitor the expulsion, suspension and exclusionary discipline practices with regard to young children; model policies relating to the social emotional learning and development of children; changes to law and policies that will support a continuum of integrated social emotional learning and development opportunities for young children; how early childhood programs and public schools can collaborate and ensure that a system is developed that efficiently utilizes limited resources and provides continuity of care for young children moving between programs and schools; and parent education that promotes young children's social emotional growth and effective responses to behavioral challenges.

In the process of this work it is anticipated that the ad hoc committee will be supported by national and local early childhood partners who can assist in the development of a carefully designed survey that will collect baseline information about exclusionary practices, staff perceptions of the prevalence of child behavior problems, and available supports, such as professional development and consultation, to promote children's social emotional health and address behavioral problems. We understand that the National Center on Children in Poverty, Ounce of Prevention, and Zero to Three have already expressed their willingness to participate in this project. We further understand that the extent of the work completed depends upon available funding.

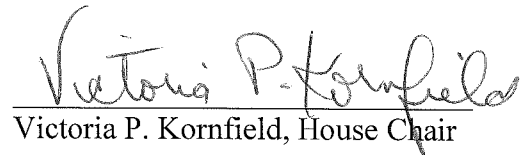
Finally, the Committee requests an interim report of the work undertaken by the ad hoc committee by December 1, 2015.

Thank you for your willingness to take on this important project. We look forward to hearing about your progress in December.

Sincerely,



Brian D. Langley, Senate Chair



Victoria P. Kornfield, House Chair

cc: Members, Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs