

April 15, 2026

Members of the Government Oversight Committee
Maine State Legislature
Augusta, Maine

Re: Follow-Up on 2023 Testimony Regarding OCFS Conditions and Improvements in the Lewiston District (D3)

Dear Members of the Government Oversight Committee,

I am writing to follow up on the concerns I shared with the Committee in 2023 regarding child protective services in Lewiston's district office. At that time, my testimony reflected a workforce under intense strain. I raised concerns about the burden of hoteling children for extended periods, the mandatory overtime required to staff those placements, difficulty recruiting and retaining staff, and the broader lack of visible relief for frontline workers.

Those concerns were real, and some continue to exist today. However, I believe it is equally important for the Committee to understand that meaningful improvements have been made since that time, particularly in district leadership and in the support provided to frontline staff.

Most importantly, leadership feels more present, more accessible, and more grounded in the day-to-day realities of the work. Bobbi Johnson and her leadership team, including Jean Haynes and Jill Hunter, have had a visible presence in our district. That matters. Frontline staff notice when leadership shows up, listens, and creates space for communication. Bobbi Johnson's Hopes and Horizons meetings have also been a meaningful part of that effort by giving staff dedicated time and space to hear updates, ask questions directly, and engage with leadership in a more open and productive way. From my perspective, that level of accessibility, along with Bobbi's approachable and responsive leadership style, has helped stabilize the district and rebuild trust.

At the local level, Program Administrator Sandi Jellison and Assistant Program Administrators Michelle Galego and Tammy Roy have played a major role in stabilizing the office and improving support to staff. Together, they have helped bring more structure, consistency, communication, and follow-through to district operations, which has made the work environment more stable and functional for frontline workers. Sandi Jellison's leadership has been an important part of that stability, and Michelle Galego and Tammy Roy have also contributed in meaningful ways through staff support, problem-solving, and efforts to improve day-to-day operations. Michelle Galego was recognized as Manager of the Year in 2025, and in my view that recognition reflects the broader strength of this local leadership team. Together, they have helped steady the district, improve the quality of the work, and strengthen retention.

I also want to highlight the Continuous Improvement Team (CIT), which Jill Hunter has helped lead. CIT is a strong example of productive district-level problem-solving. It brings together frontline staff, clerical staff, case aides, supervisors, and local leadership to identify operational

challenges and work on practical solutions. That structure matters because it gives staff across roles a meaningful voice in improving how the district functions and supports the work.

There has also been substantial effort to recruit and support new staff. More recruitment work has been done, and a dedicated training supervisor has been embedded in the district to help with onboarding and training. From a frontline perspective, that is a significant improvement. New workers need more than hiring incentives; they need support, coaching, and a better entry point into a very difficult job. I believe these efforts have contributed to improved retention and to better quality work.

Another important change since 2023 has been the implementation of the community sitter initiative. Hoteling children who lack placement remains a serious concern and should remain a concern for the Committee. However, this initiative has reduced some of the burden that previously fell almost entirely on caseworkers through mandatory overtime, while also allowing carefully vetted members of the community to step in and help support children in hotel settings. Frontline workers have seen improvement in overtime demands and in the level of support available. This is not a complete solution, but it is a meaningful improvement.

At the same time, I do not want to overstate progress. This district continues to face very high report volume and high-risk work. Social conditions continue to drive complexity in the field, including substance use, lack of housing, homelessness, and the challenges that can arise when working with immigrant and refugee families across language, cultural, and resource barriers. These realities place constant pressure on frontline staff and on the system as a whole.

Even so, there are real signs of improvement. Leadership is more visible. Strategic planning is more evident. Staff support is stronger. Onboarding is more intentional. Overtime related to hotel coverage has improved. There have also been smaller operational wins that matter in day-to-day practice, including better access to some practical supports for families and morale-building efforts within the office that have had a noticeable positive impact on staff.

My purpose in writing is not to suggest that the work is done. It is not. Rather, I want the Committee to have a fuller picture. The concerns raised in 2023 were serious and justified, but it is also fair and important to acknowledge that district and OCFS leadership have taken meaningful steps to address them. In my view, those steps are improving conditions for staff, strengthening the quality of the work, and helping with retention in a district that continues to carry very difficult child welfare work.

Thank you for your continued oversight and attention to this system.

Sincerely,

Stacey Henson-Drake, LSW