

June 15, 2021

The Honorable Representative Michael J. Finn,
House Chair
Joint Committee on Children, Families, and
Persons with Disabilities

The Honorable Senator Adam Gomez, Senate
Chair
Joint Committee on Children, Families, and
Persons with Disabilities

Dear Chair Finn, Chair Gomez, and Committee members,

The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide non-profit association of over 60 private and public organizations and individuals that collectively advocate for public policies and quality services that are in the best interest of the Commonwealth's children, youth and families. It is through public education and advocacy that CLM promotes the availability, accessibility, and quality of these needed services. Our members, who comprise providers, advocates, and regulators of services, know first-hand the struggles that children and their families face in the Commonwealth.

We are writing to testify **in support of An Act establishing the Massachusetts foster care review office** (H.211/S.88). Foster care review is currently an internal department within The Department of Children and Families (DCF). This structure creates challenges and potential conflicts of interest for ensuring a robust and independent review that is focused on safety of children and youth, appropriateness of placement, progress in resolving the need for out of home placements, achieving permanency, and accountability for achieving those goals. Foster care review is required by the federal government and is funded through the legislature (line item 4800-0025).

While some basic reforms have been made to DCF's internal processes including more consistent notification of hearings for providers, families and attorneys; the collection and dissemination of aggregate data related to hearings; and strategies to include more youth participation in the



hearings; the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) report on the death of David Almond highlights the importance of the need for external oversight of decisions made during Foster Care Reviews. The report detailed the role the foster care review panel had in changing the goal of David and his brothers back to reunification despite minimal engagement of the parents in services and no information at the review that would warrant the goal change. The panel relied solely on the limited information presented by the DCF case management staff. We believe that legislation is needed to ensure a system whereby independent oversight is clearly designated, to include an identified independent foster care review oversight authority, and that DCF will be held accountable for participating in these system changes. It is critical for the safety, permanency and well-being of children that we build in accountability to ensure the appropriate decisions are made on behalf of children in the care and custody of the Commonwealth.

We respectfully urge the Committee to report out this bill favorably and work diligently for its passage.

Sincerely,

Tammy Mello

Executive Director

Children's League of Massachusetts