

## **For Immediate Release**

### **The Child Welfare Services System Produces Better Outcomes for Children and Saves Money**

*AUGUSTA, Maine (February 16, 2011)*—A new emphasis on placing children with family members has resulted in win-win results for Maine’s child welfare services system: Fewer children enter state custody, more remain secure in their communities, and costs to the state are greatly reduced. This is one of the positive findings in the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Maine Child Welfare Services Ombudsman Report 2010, issued today by the Maine Children’s Alliance (MCA).

“We are seeing positive results due to the development of public policy that supports the placement of children in kinship families,” said MCA President and Ombudsman Dean Crocker. “This policy shift has resulted in more effective care for children, and has dramatically reduced the state’s total expense for out of home care for child welfare placements.”

When children are placed with relatives, friends or neighbors, they have the continuity of staying in familiar surroundings with people they know and trust. This sort of stability is crucial to helping children thrive during vulnerable periods. Greater awareness of this has led to an increase in kinship care placements: From 2004 to 2010, Maine children in kinship care jumped from 17.6 percent to 38.9 percent of initial placements of children in state custody. That has led the state share of residential costs to drop by 86 percent during that time period.

Crocker, who serves as the Maine Child Welfare Services Ombudsman, is authorized by the state to provide information and referrals to people seeking assistance or having complaints regarding child welfare services in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. The Ombudsman Program sets priorities for opening cases for review, based on the potential benefit to the child or to policy affecting children and families.

Crocker said the Ombudsman Report documents other ongoing improvements in the state’s system, including:

- Significant improvements in how caseworkers document their findings
- Improved quality and thoroughness of Office of Child and Family Service assessments
- Better integration of children’s behavioral health services and child welfare

While these positive trends are encouraging, Crocker said there are still serious issues to address. “Too often, youth in state custody still face uncertain futures when they leave the system. Maine still fails to identify a large percent of children at risk. And we need to provide more support and education for the children’s caregivers and community,” said Crocker.

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