25 April 2018

The 128th Legislature of the State of Maine
State House
Augusta, ME

Dear Honorable Members of the 128th Legislature:

Under the authority vested in me by Article IV, Part Third, Section 2 of the Constitution of the State of Maine, I am hereby vetoing LD 1771, “An Act to Stabilize Vulnerable Families.”

While the intentions of this bill are good, I cannot in good conscience let this bill become law. I have two primary objections. First, this bill is yet another example of the Legislature stepping in to require things of the Executive Branch that it can already do. This bill requires DHHS to seek proposals and implement a program to provide integrated substance abuse treatment and recovery for families, which can be done within the administrative authority that exists today. There is no need for a bill.

Second, I believe we sometimes race too quickly to reunify a child with his or her family when that may not be what is best for the child, and I am concerned this bill perpetuates that trend. The best place for children is in a safe, loving home with their parents; that said, child welfare programs in our State and nation have over-emphasized reunification, sometimes to the detriment of our youth. Children should be reunified with their parents only when that reunification is in the best interest of the child. We have dealt with several significant child welfare cases in the past few months, and I believe that some tragedy may have been avoided if we had first focused on the welfare of the child and only considered reunification if it was truly the best and safest option for the child.

I am concerned the program imagined by this bill will serve once again to inappropriately prioritize reunification over the welfare of the child. For these reasons, I return LD 1771 unsigned and vetoed. I strongly urge the Legislature to sustain it.

Sincerely,

Paul R. LePage
Governor