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 Sender: 2072871034 From: Debbie Stein
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STATE OF MAINE
 OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
 1 STATE HOUSE STATION
 AUGUSTA, MAINE
 04333-0001

JOHN ELIAS BALDACCIO

January 9, 2004

Senator Susan Collins
 172 Russell Senate Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20510
 By fax (202) 224-2693

Dear Senator Collins:

I am writing to ask you to consider co-sponsoring a bill that would greatly improve our knowledge of how Maine's children are faring, and thus enable us to better target our programs and services. This bill, which will be introduced by Sen. Rockefeller (D-WV), will also be offered as an amendment to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families reauthorization bill, H.R. 4, when it is taken up by the full Senate early this year. It is a no-cost provision that would greatly improve our ability to serve Maine's children.

As you know, the welfare law and other federal legislation gives Maine and all the states greatly increased authority over the programs that serve children and families. In order to make decisions about where to invest our limited resources and how to implement those programs, we in Maine need good, current data about Maine's children. Unfortunately, for the most part that data simply does not exist.

The pending legislation for reauthorization of welfare reform includes \$10 million a year to be spent on collecting data on child well-being. Unfortunately, it is directed at expanding a national survey, the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), and this would provide data only at the national level, not state by state. As you know, what is true of children in New York, or Texas, is not necessarily true of children in Maine. The expanded SIPP would only include 184 families from Maine, and not necessarily a representative sample of our families. As a result, the data is simply not statistically reliable, and cannot guide policy.

A better choice would be to invest the same money in a state level survey, by expanding the National Survey of Child Health. This approach, which is what Senator Rockefeller is proposing, would give us data every two years on the well-being of 2000 families in Maine—enough to really assess how Maine's children are doing and what we need to do to adjust state policy. This approach is a "win-win" approach—the national researchers would still be able to use the SIPP for national data collection, and policy makers in Maine and all 50 states could use the state level data to make better state level



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policy. Moreover, the state level data would be a separate resource for researchers to allow them to better assess and track the implications of policy choices.

This state level data would be collected every two years, available four to six months after collection, and easy to use. By comparison, the SIPP data is collected every four years, becomes available a year or more after collection, and is so difficult to use correctly that only a few hundred people nationwide can work with it. It is essentially unavailable to Maine agency staff.

Furthermore, if Congress adopts the state level data approach, it will be made even more useful for us in Maine because of a public/private partnership. The Annie E. Casey Foundation and other foundations have offered to invest at least \$1 million a year in training state officials and other policy analysts in using the state level data, and in providing technical assistance to people in the states on using the data, thus ensuring that the data will be appropriately used and accessible.

This data would be important as Maine implements the changes in the welfare reauthorization bill; it would however go beyond that bill to guide our decisions for a wide range of programs serving children and families. While HHS would determine the actual questions to be included in the survey, some of the information that it would include is:

- Data on how healthy our children are, which can guide our decisions in how best to invest in improving children's health;
- Data on how many children are insured, and how many are eligible for public health insurance but uninsured, which can guide our outreach and enrollment efforts for SCHIP;
- Data on contact with non-custodial parents, which we can use to develop or improve fatherhood programs;
- Data on family structure and child well-being—as you know, the welfare bill includes significant new funds for marriage promotion, and this data will help us determine what are appropriate uses for those funds;
- Data on parental perceptions of child care quality, to guide decisions on how best to invest child care funds;
- Data on the amount of time children are generally spending in child care, to guide decisions on hourly work requirements for families moving from welfare to work.

Our recent economic slow down gives a particularly good example of why we need current, state level, data. As you know, the demands on Maine's social services programs have grown just as our fiscal resources for meeting those demands have fallen. If we had current data on how children were doing and what needs were most severe, that could have guided our difficult debates over what services to cut. Data collected every two years can fill that need; data collected every four years cannot.

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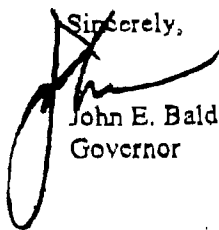
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As you know, good policy decisions rely on good information. When it comes to something as important as the well-being of Maine's children, we should not be flying blind. I know that, like me, you care deeply about the future of Maine's children. This is an important way in which we can work together on our common concern.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



John E. Baldacci
Governor

Cc: Priscilla Hobson Hanley, Committee on Governmental Affairs
By fax (202) 224 9603