“Every child has a right to grow up in a safe and supportive environment. We have an obligation and an opportunity to improve the way our child welfare system serves our most vulnerable children, youth, and families.”

The Maine Child Welfare Action Network is a group of organizations and individuals in Maine working together to align, strengthen, and sustain efforts around a mission to ensure the safety and well-being of all Maine children, youth, and families.

We all want children in our state to grow up in safe and supportive environments. Our Network stands with the families who have experienced the tragedy of a child’s death, and the immeasurable loss that represents for them and their communities. Their voices should be central in our discussions. One way we can honor their experiences now is by moving beyond debate to take collective action and implement recommended changes.

Ensuring children are safe and families are supported includes all of us as part of the broad child welfare system. Improvements in the ways children and families are served and supported can only be achieved through collaboration between government, legislators, educators, health care providers, community-based organizations, families, philanthropy, and faith and community leaders.

While our child welfare system is under scrutiny right now, such attention previously led to meaningful change. Not long ago, following a tragedy, Maine took steps to make significant reforms, ultimately becoming a national leader in child welfare. We have an opportunity and an obligation now to do this again. In 2021, our Network released a Framework for Child Welfare Reform with priority actions to serve as a road map for stakeholder action.

Significant steps were taken this legislative session on many of these strategic priorities. The Mills Administration and Legislators invested in prevention and supportive services to strengthen and stabilize families, improved the ability of Child Protective Services to intervene with families when they are in crisis to ensure child safety, and bolstered the oversight and advisory authority of the Maine Child Welfare Ombudsman, Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel, and the Legislative Health and Human Services Committee. As OPEGA continues its review of Child Protective Services, we will have more opportunities to understand challenges in the system.

Our state has an obligation and an opportunity right now to engage not only in reform, but in a transformation of our child welfare system. Working together in partnership with state and local leaders, we can develop solutions that support child and family well-being and reduce the strain on Child Protective Services. Now is the time to move beyond debate and into action. It will take us all investing our time and energy to ensure Maine children in communities across our state can grow up safe in supportive homes. In the coming months, the Network will be convening community conversations in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services to continue to advance discussion of the initiatives outlined in our Framework. We invite you to join us.