Oversight in the News

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- New child welfare chief aims to prioritize input from caseworkers, front-line workers (**PAYWALL:** Portland Press Herald, 1/27/2023)
  - The new director of the Office of Child and Family Services, Bobbi Johnson, outlined her priorities to the Government Oversight Committee, focusing on engaging with caseworkers and stakeholders to address concerns within the child protective system. Johnson plans to visit district offices to gather feedback and aims to learn from individuals with firsthand experience, including foster parents and service providers. The oversight committee is in the process of preparing policy recommendations to improve child protection for the legislature's consideration.

- Frustrated lawmakers grill Maine's child protection chief (**PAYWALL:** Portland Press Herald, 10/18/2023)
  - Lawmakers in Maine expressed frustration during a Government Oversight Committee meeting over the state agency's failure to prevent high-profile deaths of children previously known to child protective services. The Office of Family and Child Services director, Todd Landry, faced

criticism for his leadership amid reports revealing an increase in Maine's rate of repeated child maltreatment from 15.4% in 2018 to 19.6% in 2021, double the national average. Lawmakers are considering more frequent meetings and employing broader powers, including subpoenas, to investigate the child welfare system and address its shortcomings, citing a lack of progress and inadequate training and staffing as key issues.

- Four takeaways from a probe into residential care facilities (The Maine Monitor, 11/26/2023)
  - The Maine Monitor and ProPublica's investigation into Maine's Level IV residential care facilities reveals concerning oversight responses by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). From 2020 to 2022, DHHS cited these facilities for 59 resident rights violations, including cases of abuse and neglect, and approximately 650 additional violations. Despite having the authority to impose fines or issue conditional licenses, the state only fined a facility once, issued four conditional licenses, and, in nearly 85% of reported abuse and neglect incidents, took "no action," raising questions about the effectiveness of the oversight system.

- State agency, legislative committee clash in supreme court hearing over records (**PAYWALL:** Portland Press Herald, 12/6/2023)
  - Lawyers representing Maine's Government Oversight Committee and the Department of Health and Human Services clashed in the Maine Supreme Judicial Court over access to confidential case records involving children who died after contact with the state office. The committee sued the Mills administration for being denied access, citing the Legislature's authority to subpoena confidential records without explicit exemptions. The state argued that there is an established framework for reviewing the child deaths, limiting information release to the committee's investigative staff.

- Oversight panel suggests more than two dozen reforms for Maine child welfare system (Maine Morning Star, 5/10/2024)
  - The Government Oversight Committee in Maine recommended over two dozen reforms for the state's child welfare system, aiming to address issues like work conditions and child safety. The bipartisan recommendations seek to enhance resources, mental health support, and legal access within the system. Despite ongoing challenges, efforts are being made to implement these changes and improve the current state of child welfare in Maine.

- New federal data shows Maine’s child welfare agency is moving against national trends (The Maine Monitor, 1/19/2025)
  - A Government Oversight Committee hearing in Maine reviewed the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) decision to reduce access to children's residential treatment facilities, opting for community-based care instead. Lawmakers raised concerns about the adequacy of these community services, workforce shortages, and the impact on children with severe mental health needs. DHHS defended the policy shift as aligned with federal guidelines, emphasizing efforts to improve service availability and quality in home-based settings.

- Oversight Committee wants answers from Maine Housing about problems with LIHEAP (Maine Public, 2/20/2025)
  - The Government Oversight Committee in Maine is seeking answers from Maine Housing regarding issues with the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Lawmakers have raised concerns about delays in processing applications and distributing heating aid, which have left some residents without assistance during the winter. Maine Housing officials are expected to provide explanations and potential solutions in an upcoming hearing.

- Bipartisan bill proposes more legislative oversight of Maine cannabis office director (Spectrum News, 3/10/2025)
  - A bipartisan bill in Maine proposes increased legislative oversight of the state's Office of Cannabis Policy director. The measure would require the director's appointment to be subject to legislative confirmation, aiming to improve accountability and transparency. Supporters believe this change would enhance public trust, while opponents argue it may complicate the appointment process.

- Lawmakers question Maine’s health department after federal audit (Maine Morning Star, 2/16/2026)
  - Maine lawmakers questioned officials from the Department of Health and Human Services during a legislative hearing following a federal audit that identified compliance and oversight deficiencies. According to the audit, the department did not meet certain federal requirements tied to program administration and funding. Committee members said they are seeking corrective action plans and may pursue continued oversight to ensure the agency addresses the findings.

- Bill to increase oversight of Maine’s jails headed to Gov. Mills’ desk (4/6/2026)
  - A Maine bill aimed at increasing oversight of county jails is headed to Gov. Janet Mills after clearing the Legislature. According to supporters, the measure would expand the authority of the state corrections ombudsman to investigate complaints, inspect facilities, and review jail conditions. County officials raised concerns about potential costs and duplication of existing oversight, but lawmakers said the bill would improve accountability and transparency.