



THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

November 18, 2025

Secretary Kiame Mahaniah
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
1 Ashburton Pl, Boston, MA 02108

Re: Office of the Child Advocate Nomination Process

Dear Secretary Mahaniah,

Thank you for your timely attention to the needs of the children in the Commonwealth, as well as your stewardship of the transition from our current Child Advocate to the next. We write to emphasize points raised directly by affected individuals and skilled advocates at the November 5 listening session.

First, we believe the state must conduct a wide search that reaches beyond Massachusetts and the current Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) staff to ensure it surfaces candidates with the experience, expansive understanding, and the expertise required to lead the OCA. We are curious if there has been consideration given to appointing an interim Child Advocate to lead the agency through this significant transition. We are concerned that the need to meet the deadline could lead to haste and — possibly — not as qualified as a final candidate.

The next Child Advocate must be someone who will be bold in their efforts to address the well-documented and largely poor outcomes of the state's child protection system. The next Child Advocate must prevent poor people from being unnecessarily charged with neglect, protect immigrant children, address the trauma children and youth experience when involved with the child protection system, wrap protection and services around LGBTQ youth, and assist the state to plan for, and react to, the federal impacts on the Massachusetts safety net and our most vulnerable citizens — children.

Additionally, although the current members of the Nominating Committee meet the requirements of the enabling law, we recognize there are significant gaps in representation. Given that we cannot realistically change the underlying statute in time, how can we help ensure that voices of those most affected by our systems be part of the nominating process discussions? The listening session alone was not adequate. We need representation from lived experience, LGBTQ+, disability, and immigrant communities.

Finally, advocates and the families with whom we have been working with during our tenure in the legislature and prior to our election have expressed sincere interest in remaining involved in the nominating process. We hope that they are afforded access to timely information on more opportunities to engage.

We believe the Massachusetts Child Advocate appointment will be one of the most consequential appointments this Administration will make for vulnerable and marginalized children, youth, and families. The role of the Child Advocate is critically important to fulfill the obligation of that office and to ensure that families are centered, truly supported, and protected. Therefore, the next Child Advocate must be ready to view these services through the lens of those whom they are entrusted to help.

We reiterate our sincere appreciation of your efforts and the work of your team. And we underscore our interest in providing all possible support for this process. We look forward to our continued partnership with your Office and to the opportunity to work closely with you now and in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

Tricia Farley-Bouvier
State Representative
2nd Berkshire District

Joanne Comerford
State Senator
Hampshire, Franklin, Worcester District