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OPEGA
ANNUAL
REPORT



OPEGA Annual Report 2024

January
2025

a report to the
Government Oversight Committee and the Legislature
from the
Office of Program Evaluation & Government Accountability
of the Maine State Legislature

Government Oversight Committee of the 132nd Legislature

Senator Craig V. Hickman, Chair
Senator Mike Tipping
Senator Jill C. Duson
Senator Jeff Timberlake
Senator Rick Bennett
Senator Brad T. Farrin

Representative Anne-Marie Mastraccio, Chair
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Requests for OPEGA reviews are considered by the Government Oversight Committee in accordance with a standard process. Requests must be made in writing and must be initiated or sponsored by a legislator. Individual legislators or citizens should review the process and FAQ that are posted on OPEGA's website at <http://legislature.maine.gov/opega/request-for-a-review>. There is also a form there to help facilitate the GOC's consideration of the request. Legislative committees can request reviews directly through a written communication to the Government Oversight Committee.

Copies of OPEGA's reports are free.

Reports are available in electronic format at:

<http://legislature.maine.gov/opegareports>

Hard copies may be obtained by contacting OPEGA at:

(207) 287-1901



PETER SCHLECK
DIRECTOR

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE
OFFICE OF PROGRAM EVALUATION AND
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

January 10, 2025

The Honorable Craig V. Hickman, Senate Chair
The Honorable Anne-Marie Mastraccio, House Chair
Members of the Government Oversight Committee
82 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

The Honorable Matthea Elisabeth Larsen Daughtry, President of the Senate
Members of the 132nd Maine Senate
3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

The Honorable Ryan D. Fecteau, Speaker of the House
Members of the 132nd Maine House of Representatives
2 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Government Oversight Committee Members, Senators and Representatives:

In accordance with 3 MRSA §995(4), I respectfully submit the Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA) Annual Report for 2024. OPEGA's service to the Legislature as an independent, non-partisan resource is meant to support the important role of legislative oversight and to help improve the performance of State government. We remain committed to serving Maine's legislators and citizens as a trusted source of objective, credible information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter Schleck".

Peter Schleck
Director

cc: Darek M. Grant, Secretary of the Senate
Robert B. Hunt, Clerk of the House

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About OPEGA

History

The Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA) is a non-partisan, independent legislative office created by Public Law 2001, Chapter 702. OPEGA first became operational in January 2005. Its authorizing statute is 3 MRSA §§991-1002. Public Law 2015, Chapter 344 added evaluations of tax expenditures to OPEGA's responsibilities.

Organization

OPEGA is part of an organizational arrangement within the Legislature that ensures both independence and accountability. This structure is critical to ensuring that OPEGA can perform its function in an environment as free of political influence and bias as possible.

The Legislative Council appoints the Director of OPEGA for a renewable five-year term and sets the Director's salary. OPEGA's activities are overseen by the Government Oversight Committee (GOC), a 12-member bi-partisan and bi-cameral committee appointed by legislative leaders according to Joint Rule. The GOC approves OPEGA's budget and annual work plan and monitors OPEGA's use of resources and performance.

Staffing

OPEGA has an authorized permanent staff of nine full-time positions including the Director, the

Administrative Secretary, who also serves as the GOC Clerk, and a group of analysts, senior analysts and a principal analyst. Two of the analyst positions are devoted to tax expenditure evaluations.

Function

OPEGA primarily supports legislative oversight by conducting independent program evaluations of State government as directed by the GOC. OPEGA also has authority to perform program evaluations of non-State entities that receive State funds or have been established to perform governmental functions. As legislators perform their oversight function, they often have questions about how policies are being implemented, how programs are being managed, how money is being spent and what results are being achieved.

The GOC and OPEGA address those questions from an unbiased perspective through rigorous program evaluations. The independence and authorities granted in the statute governing the GOC and OPEGA provide the Legislature with a valuable supplement to the oversight conducted by the policy committees. In addition, the GOC and OPEGA examine governmental programs and activities that cut across State agencies and span the jurisdictions of multiple policy committees.

The results of OPEGA's reviews are provided to legislators and the public through formal written reports and public presentations.

The Year in Review

OPEGA Completed Two Projects and Began Work on Two Projects

OPEGA Projects Completed in 2024	
	Report Date
Information Brief: Child Protective Services Reunification https://www.legislature.maine.gov/doc/10785	2/2024
OCFS Case File Review: Safety Decisions and Actions Taken in the Case of Sylus Melvin https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11131	9/2024
Projects in Progress	
Select Financial Operations at Maine Veterans' Homes	Expected 3/2025
Riverview and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Hospitals Special Project	Due 2/2025

OPEGA Completed Two Tax Evaluations and Began Work on Two Additional Tax Evaluations

Tax Expenditure Evaluations Completed in 2024	
	Report Date
Credit for Maine Shipbuilding Facility Investment https://www.legislature.maine.gov/doc/10957	5/2024
Credit for Paper Manufacturing Facility Investment https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11127	9/2024
Tax Expenditure Evaluations in Progress	
Credit for Major Business Headquarters Expansion	Expected 2025
Credit for Major Food Processing & Manufacturing Facilities Expansion	

OPEGA Projects Completed in 2024

Information Brief: Child Protective Services Reunification

OPEGA’s information brief on family reunification in the child welfare system describes the process and the roles of Maine District Courts and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS). The goal of reunification is to find permanent homes for children in state custody, with a preference for returning children to their biological parents. Federal law prioritizes reunifying families as the best outcome, if the circumstances that jeopardize the child’s health or welfare can be alleviated. The courts—through the work of judges, child representatives, and attorneys for parents and for OCFS—ultimately decide what parents need to do to reunify with their child and whether to restore parental custody or find another form of permanency such as adoption. OCFS arranges foster placements for the child, supports resource families and kinship placements that provide foster care, provides social work to help children recover from maltreatment and prepare to return to their biological parents, and identifies needs and arranges services to help parents alleviate the conditions that led to a child’s removal. OCFS is responsible for achieving another form of permanency when reunification is no longer an option.

OPEGA’s work included reviewing state and federal law and policies, analyzing quality assurance case review data from 2017 to 2023, and interviewing 58 staff and stakeholders. OPEGA identified four cross-cutting challenges that are prevalent in reunification casework.

Challenge Areas Identified

- 1 Caseworker practice fell short in areas of assessing parental substance abuse and family engagement. OPEGA identified caseworker inexperience, challenges with drug screening, and inadequate training as contributing factors to these deficiencies.
- 2 High workloads of caseworkers impacted safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children. OPEGA noted that caseworker turnover, lack of support staff, and lack of visitation supervisors and transportation services for families contributed to this challenge area.
- 3 Wait lists for evaluations and treatment hindered progress towards reunification for parents that required mental health evaluations, mental health treatment, and substance use disorder treatment.
- 4 Case reviews identified challenges with timeliness of filing terminations of parental rights, leading to delays in permanency for children. Several factors contributed to delays, including caseworker workload and the backlog of cases in the judicial system delaying hearings necessary for timely reunification.

OCFS Case File Review: Safety Decisions and Actions Taken in the Case of Sylus Melvin

The Government Oversight Committee of the 130th Maine State Legislature directed OPEGA to review records generated by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) during its involvement with the families of four Maine children who died in 2021.

This fourth of OPEGA's four reports presented its review of the case of Sylus Melvin. OPEGA examined whether decisions made by OCFS staff were sound considering prevailing child protection policy and practice, the laws governing such matters, and the information known (or that should have reasonably been known) to authorities when their decisions were made. The report describes the legal, policy, and practice frameworks through which the Department must process that information.

OPEGA concluded that the casework performed from the time of Sylus' birth on July 28, 2021, to his death on August 29, 2021 was sound within the parameters we have applied in our four case file reviews. The efforts of the CPS caseworker during Sylus' life were thorough. Given the information known to the Department at the time, casework practice and decision-making met OCFS policy standards. OPEGA could find no evidence that the Department was made aware of specific safety threats to Sylus' mother and the children by Sylus' father during that time frame.

However, OPEGA also reviewed the Department's historical involvement with the family, which began in 2018. During this time period, OPEGA identified one instance in which it concluded that an unsound safety decision was made regarding the safety of Sylus' older full sibling. OPEGA also identified two practice issues.

Issues Identified Preceding Sylus' Birth

- 1 Unsound Safety Decision: Placing a child in a home without assessing the safety of that home and caregivers.
- 2 Overarching Practice Issue: An out-of-home child was not located to assess for safety.
- 3 Specific Practice Issue: A child was placed with an out-of-home caregiver, but a safety plan was not documented.

Across the whole of CPS involvement with the family, three potential opportunities for improvement and a practice observation are also discussed in OPEGA's conclusions.

Potential Opportunities for Improvement and a Practice Observation

- 1 Caseworkers and supervisors should be included in the development of the Department's public memoranda.
- 2 All relevant call logs for involved caseworkers and supervisors should be collected and preserved when there is both an open case and a child fatality.
- 3 Information sharing between law enforcement and CPS should be improved to ensure that CPS has all information needed to assess possible concerns.
- 4 In developing Parental Rights & Responsibilities Orders, courts should consider recommending or requiring third party supervision for child visitation when the family has a history of domestic violence.

Tax Expenditure Evaluations Completed in 2024

Evaluation of the Credit for Maine Shipbuilding Facility Investment

The Credit for Maine Shipbuilding Facility Investment (Shipbuilding Credit) was enacted in 2018 under Title 36 §5219-RR. It is a non-refundable income tax credit of up to \$45M over 15 years for a business that makes a qualifying investment of \$200M in a Maine shipbuilding facility. The annual credit amount is adjusted based on the claimant's employment levels, with no credit available in years when qualifying employment falls below 4,000. The Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and Maine Revenue Services (MRS) jointly administer the credit, and the agencies' small administrative costs are covered by existing resources.

The Shipbuilding Credit Is Accessible by One Business

Maine has many boat and shipbuilding businesses, but only Bath Iron Works is large enough to meet the employment threshold for the Shipbuilding Credit. Additionally, statute caps the credit at \$200M of qualifying investment, and Bath Iron Works has invested that full amount. No more credit is available, even if another shipbuilder could meet the credit's employment requirements.

Job Creation and Investment Have Occurred; It's Unclear How Much Is Due to the Credit

Job creation and investment by the credit's sole user have exceeded statutory minimums. However, it is unclear how much impact the Shipbuilding Credit had on the timing, magnitude, or nature of job creation and investment. The impact of an incentive on behavior is often difficult to ascertain, because many factors influence business investment decisions. In the case of Bath Iron Works, federal contracting and naval policy are likely significant factors.

The Credit Is Sizable and Substantially Impacts Tax Competitiveness for a Large Shipbuilder

The Shipbuilding Credit represents a substantial discount on the qualifying investment – roughly 22.5% in total. A cost reduction of this magnitude has the potential to impact a business's competitiveness within its industry. Effective tax rate analysis shows that, for a large shipbuilder that can access the Shipbuilding Credit, Maine's tax environment ranks in the middle among comparison states when state and local incentives are applied. If the Shipbuilding Credit were not available, and all other variables were held constant, Maine's tax environment would be the least competitive among comparison states.

Recommendations for Legislative Consideration

- 1 The Legislature may want to consider other tools for providing incentives to single entities in the future.
- 2 The Legislature may want to consider approaches to increase transparency around use of multiple incentives.

Recommendations for Program Administrators

- 4 DECD should implement statutory requirements around annual data reporting more effectively.
- 5 DECD should take additional steps to confirm compliance with requirements for job quality and preference for Maine companies.

Evaluation of the Credit for Maine Paper Manufacturing Facility Investment

The Credit for Paper Manufacturing Facility Investment (Paper Manufacturing Credit) was enacted in 2021 under Title 36 §5219-YY and may be claimed beginning in tax year 2024. It is a refundable income tax credit of up to \$16M over 10 years for a business that makes a qualifying investment of \$40M in a Maine paper manufacturing facility. The annual credit amount is 4% of the qualifying investment, capped at \$1.6M. The Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and Maine Revenue Services (MRS) jointly administer the credit, and both agencies' administrative costs are small enough to absorb within existing resources.

The Paper Manufacturing Credit Is Accessible by One Business

Although statute does not explicitly limit the number of users of the credit, OPEGA found that only one business in Maine can qualify. Maine has several paper manufacturers, but only Twin Rivers Paper Company meets all of the requirements for the Paper Manufacturing Credit. The window for qualifying investment for the credit closed on December 31, 2023, so no further investment can qualify even if another paper manufacturer were able to meet the credit's statutory requirements in the future.

Job Retention and Investment Have Occurred; It's Unclear How Much is Due to the Credit

Job retention and investment by the credit's sole user have met statutory minimums. However, it is unclear how the Paper Manufacturing Credit impacted the timing, magnitude, or nature of the company's employment and investment decisions. Assessing the impact of incentives on behavior is difficult because many factors influence business decisions, and the relative importance of these factors may not be visible from outside the company.

That said, the Paper Manufacturing Credit offers a substantial discount on a company's qualifying investment—up to 40% in total. A cost reduction of this magnitude is more likely to impact a business's investment decisions and its ability to be competitive within its industry. Effective tax rate analysis shows that Maine's tax environment for a business that can access the Paper Manufacturing Credit is competitive with comparison states but is less so without the credit. Since this increase in tax competitiveness is only available to the credit's one user, other Maine paper manufacturers could be at a disadvantage in the marketplace if they cannot access comparable tax incentives.

Recommendations for Legislative Consideration

- 1 The Legislature may want to consider other tools for providing incentives to single entities in the future.
- 2 The Legislature may want to consider approaches to increase transparency around use of multiple incentives.
- 3 Clarification of one measure for evaluating the credit may be needed.

Recommendations for Program Administrators

- 4 DECD should take additional steps to confirm compliance with requirements for job quality.
- 5 DECD should include additional information in annual reports to allow legislators to monitor fiscal impact developments.

Projects in Progress

During 2024, OPEGA began work on two projects and two tax expenditure evaluations.

Select Financial Operations at Maine Veterans' Homes Review

In September 2023, the GOC voted to approve OPEGA's recommendation to continue work by assessing internal controls over spending in relation to budgetary limits and related processes at Maine Veterans' Homes (MVH). The OPEGA review focuses on:

- Internal controls over MVH spending on supplies and services, in relation to established budgetary limits.
- The relative timeliness of accounts payable accrual and processing.
- The extent to which internal data (and data systems), including relating to purchasing, payroll, and human resources, adequately supports and informs MVH spending within established budgetary limits.

Field work began in spring 2024.

Riverview and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Hospitals Special Project

In October 2024, the GOC voted to have OPEGA acquire and compile data regarding staffing and staff safety at two psychiatric hospitals in response to a request brought before the Committee. In addition to data gathering, the GOC asked OPEGA staff to collect and compile staff perspectives on staffing adequacy, staff safety and retention. The GOC asked OPEGA to report back the results of this work by February 15, 2025.

Tax Expenditure Evaluations of the Credit for Major Business Headquarters Expansion and the Credit for Major Food Processing & Manufacturing Facilities Expansion

In April 2023, the GOC set parameters for four tax expenditure evaluations, including the Credit for Shipbuilding Facility Investment and the Credit for Paper Manufacturing Facility Investment which both had evaluations completed in 2024. With the completion of these two reviews, OPEGA staff have begun field work on the Evaluation of the Credit for Major Business Headquarters Expansion and the Evaluation of the Credit for Major Food Processing & Manufacturing Facilities Expansion. The approved parameters for the evaluations are found at OPEGA's website.

OPEGA Tax Evaluations in Progress with Approved Parameters	
Evaluation	Parameters
Credit for Major Business Headquarters Expansion	https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/9999
Credit for Major Food Processing & Manufacturing Facilities Expansion	https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/10000

OPEGA staff expects to complete both reviews in 2025.

Tax Expenditure Review Updates and Categorization Process

PL 2023, Ch. 417 made adjustments to the tax expenditure review process that had impacts on OPEGA tax expenditure analysts' activities in 2024 and may impact future work.

New Potential Ongoing Work for OPEGA Tax Staff

The legislation enacted 3 MRS §998(6) which creates “limited analysis projects” to be completed by OPEGA. The Taxation Committee can request that the GOC approve OPEGA staff to complete up to two projects per session. The projects are to be based upon readily available data and submitted to the GOC and the Taxation Committee within 30 days of GOC approval. Projects were able to be requested starting in 2024, but OPEGA received no project requests this year. OPEGA may be tasked with these projects in future years, requiring staff resources during the session.

The legislation also enacted 3 MRS §1002 which requires that certain tax expenditure legislation be evaluated by the Taxation Committee, in consultation with OPEGA, before being enacted. When policy committees process bills that contain tax expenditures that are supported by a majority of members, they are directed to send those bills to the Taxation Committee for consideration. For bills that are determined to create tax expenditures likely to receive a full evaluation by OPEGA, the Taxation Committee, in consultation with OPEGA, evaluates whether the proposal:

- Identifies purposes and goals for the expenditure;
- Identifies data/information necessary for evaluation, and the agency responsible for its collection;
- Requires applicable data be reported to OPEGA; and
- Provides the framework for OPEGA to evaluate the expenditure under 3 MRS §999.

After this process, the Taxation Committee reports recommendations for bill amendments to the policy committee if needed.

In 2024, OPEGA was not formally consulted on any tax expenditure legislation during session. OPEGA may be consulted in this capacity in future years.

OPEGA Proposal for Expedited Review Category

PL 2023, Ch. 417 also eliminated the Expedited Review process from statute for the Taxation Committee but retained the Expedited Review category for the purposes of categorizing tax incentives. Although the Expedited Review process no longer exists, at present, there are 91 tax expenditures categorized in the Expedited Review category. Future tax expenditures that are enacted or tax expenditures that undergo a change in revenue loss estimates could also be moved into this category.

At the August 21, 2024, GOC meeting, OPEGA recommended that the Expedited Category be removed from statute for the purposes of categorization, moving the incentives into the No Review category. The Committee voted unanimously to accept this proposal and to send a letter to the 132nd GOC recommending this change be made. The letter included draft bill language for the future Committee's consideration. OPEGA's proposal can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11080>

OPEGA Recommendations in Response to Ch. 417 Requirement

Under PL 2023, Ch. 417, Section 9, OPEGA was tasked with proposing changes which could enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the tax expenditure review process, paying particular attention to evaluation parameters and the schedule and pace of full evaluations. OPEGA was directed to identify and make any recommended changes to the GOC and the Taxation Committee by November 1, 2024.

OPEGA presented a proposal to the GOC at the October 16, 2024 meeting, and separately sent a letter to the Taxation Committee with the same proposal. OPEGA's proposal identified six topic areas where it is either already making changes, working to make changes, or has identified opportunities for legislative action, if desired. The GOC discussed the proposal and voted unanimously of those present to endorse OPEGA's recommendations, send a letter to the 132nd GOC with that endorsement, and direct OPEGA to prepare draft legislation related to the recommendations for the 132nd GOC's consideration.

OPEGA's recommendations can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11189>

Expenditure Categorization and Scheduling Process

Each year the GOC reviews and makes “any necessary adjustments to the review category assignments and schedule” according to 3 MRS §998(3). Statute dictates that this annual review shall be conducted by October 1 of each year, in consultation with the Taxation Committee. The GOC's annual process builds on the work of previous Committees by reviewing the categorization of tax expenditures and the schedule of reviews, with a focus on any changes in the previous year that indicate expenditures should be added, removed or re-categorized.

At its October 16th meeting, OPEGA provided the GOC with proposed 2024 categorization changes and the proposed schedule for full evaluations to be completed. The GOC voted unanimously to accept OPEGA's recommended changes and schedule with the addition that the Employer Credit for Family and Medical was also removed for the Full Evaluation Schedule due to a federal sunset date and low revenue loss estimate. OPEGA's recommendations can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11184>

At the same meeting, the GOC also approved OPEGA's proposals that three additional tax expenditures classified for Full Evaluation would be removed from the Full Evaluation schedule instead of receiving parameters for review. OPEGA's proposals can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11182>

The final approved tax evaluation schedule can be found here: <https://www.legislature.maine.gov/doc/11195>

Staff Presentation at the 2024 National Conference of State Legislature's Roundtable on Evaluating Economic Development Tax Incentives

In October 2024, staff were invited to present at the NCSL Roundtable on Evaluating Economic Development in a session titled “Evaluating Evaluation Processes.” OPEGA tax expenditure evaluation staff provided a presentation on its experience with the Tax Expenditure Review Working Group and subsequent legislation emerging from that process (PL 2023, Ch. 417).

Activities Related to Past OPEGA Reports

At times the work of the GOC includes following up on past OPEGA reviews by asking for updates or additional information. The GOC takes these actions to ensure that opportunities for improvement are addressed, and OPEGA staff facilitate and support these monitoring activities. OPEGA also makes itself available to the Taxation Committee, including at work sessions, when bills are processed related to OPEGA's tax evaluations.

OPEGA also promotes its and the GOC's work by submitting reports for consideration for recognition to the National Legislative Program Evaluation Society through the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Update on the Office of the State Fire Marshal

In 2023, the GOC assigned OPEGA a survey of staff of the Fire Marshal's Office. OPEGA reported the results of that survey to the GOC in July 2023. The results indicated persistent staff concerns and the Committee asked to receive an update from new management within 6 months.

At the May 15, 2024 GOC meeting, the GOC invited members of the Legislature's Criminal Justice and Public Safety (CJPS) Committee to join the meeting to discuss updates on the work culture and climate of the Fire Marshal's Office. The Committee heard updates from the-then Maine State Fire Marshal, Richard McCarthy, and the Department of Public Safety Commissioner, Michael Sauschuck. Members of the GOC and CJPS were able to ask additional questions.

Update on Maine Commission on Public Defense Services

OPEGA completed an evaluation of the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services (MCILS) in November 2020. The report had findings related to the adequacy of the systems and procedures used by MCILS to process payments associated with providing legal representation, as well as findings on the adequacy of the oversight structure of MCILS. The Committee received periodic updates from MCILS management following the release of that evaluation to monitor progress.

At the August 21, 2024 GOC meeting, the GOC invited the Executive Director of the Maine Commission on Public Defense Services (the new name for MCILS as of April 2024) to address the Committee regarding trends in available defense attorneys and pending court matters and to answer Committee questions.

NLPES 2024 Certificate of Impact: Visual Media Incentives Tax Evaluation

OPEGA was awarded a 2024 NLPES Certificate of Impact. The panel of judges on the NLPES Awards Subcommittee determined that the Visual Media Incentives Tax Evaluation report resulted in documented program improvements and legislative impacts. The award was presented to OPEGA at the 2024 NLPES Professional Development Seminar in New Orleans in October.

Support to the GOC and the Legislature

In addition to evaluation work, OPEGA staff also support the GOC by preparing materials for GOC meetings and at times also provide presentations to other Legislative entities. OPEGA also receives and processes review requests for the GOC's consideration.

Staffing of the Government Oversight Committee

OPEGA supported the Government Oversight Committee during the Committee's twelve meetings of 2024. The meeting dates, topics covered, and links to related meeting minutes are provided in the table below.

Video recordings of the meetings can be found by navigating to the desired date at:

<https://legislature.maine.gov/Audio/#220>.

2024 Meetings of the Government Oversight Committee		
Meeting	Topics Covered	Meeting Summary
January 5 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee Discussion Regarding CPS Focus Areas OPEGA Annual Report Presentation 	https://www.legislature.maine.gov/doc/11146
January 12 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee Discussion Regarding CPS Focus Areas Presentation by Maine Child Welfare Action Network Committee Questions for DHHS Representatives 	https://www.legislature.maine.gov/doc/11147
January 26 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee Discussion of Potential CPS Reforms and Draft Committee Report Committee Questions for DHHS Commissioner Lambrew and CPS Director Johnson 	https://www.legislature.maine.gov/doc/11148
February 9 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation by Child Welfare Ombudsman Committee Discussion of Data Requests for DHHS Committee Discussion of Draft Committee Report on Child Protection 	https://www.legislature.maine.gov/doc/11149
February 23 rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of OPEGA Info Brief on Child Protective Services Reunification Committee Finalization and Vote on Committee Report: Front Line Perspectives as Catalysts for Reform 	https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11179
March 22 nd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Hearing on OPEGA Info Brief on Child Protective Services Reunification 	https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/10961
May 15 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of the Shipbuilding Facility Investment Credit Evaluation Update by the Fire Marshal's Office 	https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11019
June 26 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion of Evaluation Request related to State Procurement Public Hearing on the Shipbuilding Facility Investment Credit Evaluation 	https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11076
August 21 st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion of the Maine Commission of Public Defense Services Work Session for the Shipbuilding Facility Investment Credit Evaluation OPEGA Proposal Regarding Expedited Tax Evaluation Category Proposal by Representative Fay for a Review of Procurement 	https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11133

2024 Meetings of the Government Oversight Committee

Meeting	Topics Covered	Meeting Summary
September 18 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation by DAFS on Procurement Process • Presentation of the Paper Manufacturing Facility Investment Tax Credit Evaluation • OPEGA Proposal Regarding Next Three Tax Expenditures Set for Evaluation • Presentation of Case File Review: Safety Decisions and Actions Taken in the Case of Sylus Melvin 	https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11178
October 16 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of Review Request Regarding Staffing of Riverview and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Hospitals • Public Hearing and Work Session for Paper Manufacturing Facility Investment Tax Credit Evaluation • OPEGA Proposal Regarding Next Three Tax Expenditures Set for Evaluation • 2024 Tax Expenditure Categorization and Scheduling Process • OPEGA Proposal Regarding Ch. 417 Tax Expenditure Review Process Improvements • Public Hearing on Case File Review: Safety Decisions and Actions Taken in the Case of Sylus Melvin • Consideration of Review Request Regarding State Procurement 	https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/11254
November 14 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of Topics for OPEGA Preliminary Research on State Procurement • Consideration of further Committee Work on Child Protection 	[Meeting Summary Not Yet Available]

Support for GOC Consideration of Review Requests

OPEGA receives review requests routinely from members of the public and legislators. OPEGA works to help those interested put together a formal review request, which must be sponsored by a legislator, for Committee consideration.

2024 Review Requests Considered by the GOC

State Procurement

Initial Request Date

6.17.2024

Sponsor

Representative Fay

Description

The request asked for an OPEGA evaluation of the State of Maine's procurement process for goods and services in response to recent news reports regarding high-profile impacts of procurement outcomes as well as anecdotal conversations shared by constituents.

Relevant GOC Meetings

6.26; 9.18; 10.16; 11.14

Final Disposition in 2024

As a first step, the GOC asked OPEGA to summarize past office work on the topic and for DAFS to address whether concerns were met.

DAFS provided a presentation on procurement at the September 18th meeting. At the November 16, 2024 meeting, the GOC agreed on a list of areas of interest for a possible procurement review. It directed OPEGA to summarize the discussion and present it to the 132nd GOC for consideration.

Riverview and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Hospitals Worker Safety

Initial Request Date

9.3.2024 (Initial request was in May 2023, but a new request was made in 2024.)

Sponsors

In 2023, Senator Tipping on behalf of the Labor and Housing Committee

In 2024, Representatives Bridgeo and LaRochelle

Description

Request for an OPEGA review of employee safety issues, appropriate staffing levels (including potential difficulties with recruitment and retention), and resources for workers at Riverview and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Hospitals. The GOC voted to send a letter to the HHS Committee to consider these issues and respond to the GOC with recommendations. HHS informed the GOC in September 2023 that it would seek updated information from DHHS on staffing and safety measures at the facilities.

A new request came to the GOC in September 2024 for an OPEGA study on the injury rates of employees at the two facilities, with a hearing to obtain testimony from psychiatric center staff regarding staff recruitment, retention, and safety.

Relevant GOC Meetings

9.18; 10.16

Final Disposition in 2024

In October 2024, the GOC voted to have OPEGA acquire and compile data regarding staffing and injuries of staff at the two psychiatric hospitals. In addition to the data gathering, the GOC asked OPEGA to collect and compile staff and hospital administration perspectives on injuries and staff retention. The GOC asked for OPEGA to report back the results of the work by February 15, 2025.

Director Presentation to the Blue Ribbon Commission to Study the Organization of and Service Delivery by the Department of Health and Human Services

Director Schleck presented about OPEGA's and the GOC's work on child protective services at the May 29, 2024 meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission to Study the Organization of and Service Delivery by the Department of Health and Human Services.

OPEGA's Budget

The following table shows OPEGA's general fund budget and actual expenditures for the past three fiscal years. The FY 2025 numbers are as of November 30, 2024.

OPEGA's Budget and Expenditures by Fiscal Year – As of 12/31/2024			
	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025 ¹
Total General Fund budget	\$1,566,846	\$1,837,028 ²	\$1,475,874
Total General Fund dollars expended	\$1,291,864	\$1,716,477	\$603,300
Dollar variance of expenditures to budget	(\$274,982)	(\$120,551)	\$(872,574)
% variance of expenditures to budget	(18%)	(7%)	(60%)

Prior year balances:

Personal Services -	\$ 700,044
All Other -	\$ 675,615
Total -	\$ 1,375,659

The prior year balances have accumulated over several years. Balances in personal services are due to health premium holidays, lower than projected premium rates for health insurance, staff vacancies, and changes in staff. Balances in the "All Other" line are mostly due to unused funds intended for hiring consultants.

¹ The Fiscal Year runs through June 30, 2025.

² This amount was revised during the fiscal year mostly to cover certain additional consulting costs. The initial budget amount for FY2024 was \$1,537,028. The additional amount was allotted from the prior year balances.