

Maine Justice for Children Task Force
August 2, 2019 10:00am to 12:00am
Multipurpose Room- Capital Judicial Center, Augusta
MEETING MINUTES

Attendees:

Hon. Leigh Saufley, Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court; Hon. Ellen Gorman, Associate Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court; Hon. Susan Oram, Chief Judge of the District Court; Caroline Jova, Esq., Family Division Manager, Betsy Boardman, Esq., Child Protective and Juvenile Process Specialist; Representative Colleen Madigan; Shawna Lund, Family Violence Project; Cassie Rodgers, Esq., GAL; Debra Dunlap, Regional Director, Community Partnerships for Protecting Children; Jamie Brooks, Parent Partner; Dr. Todd Landry, Director of the Office of Child and Family Services; Michael Kearney, Esq., Assistant Attorney General; Page Nichols, Department of Education; Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director of Child and Welfare Services; John Pelletier, Esq., Executive Director, MCILS; Mike Sauschuck, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety; Gayle Erdheim, Department of Education; John Coyne, Juvenile Field Services, Department of Corrections; Liam Shaw, Maine Enhanced Parenting Project Coordinator.

- I. Welcome:** Hon. Leigh Saufley, Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court
 1. Purpose of the Task Force.
- II. Minutes from January 25, 2019 Approved**
- III. Introduction of Attendees**
- IV. Updates**
 1. **Judicial Branch:** Hon. Susan Oram, Chief Judge of the District Court
 - The “one judge, one family” model for family matters (divorce, parental rights, and paternity) has been implemented statewide.
 - Judicial vacancies may have to wait to be filled until January or February
 - There has been a substantial overall increase in child protective filings with some courts seeing greater increases than others.
 - The Family Division of the MJB will be training several new CASA volunteers in mid-August.
 - There is an overall need for more GALs throughout the state.
 2. **Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS):** Dr. Todd Landry, Director
 - Request for Proposal (RFP) process has been completed for a new child welfare information system. Work on the new system cannot be commenced until an appellate process has been completed.
 - Improvements have been made to the intake call system.
 - Family First Prevention Services Act: Once Maine implements Family First, Title IV-E, funding will be available for some prevention services for families at risk of becoming system-involved. Planning for implementation will begin this fall.
 - New child welfare positions: 62 new positions as of September 1.
 - OCFS has seen a reduction in turnover rate for caseworkers from around 34% last year to less than 10% this year.
 - As of August 1, 2019, 2,196 children were in care.

3. Office of the Maine Attorney General, Child Protective Division:

Mike Kearny, Assistant Attorney General on behalf of Nora Sosnoff, Division Chief

- Two additional AAGs have been hired due to increased filings (filings are up 50%)
- Stakeholders have provided feedback that the reunification and rehabilitation plan is currently too complex, and efforts are being undertaken to make the plans easier to understand and effectuate.
- AAGs are experiencing delays in getting CODE evaluations.
- Recruitment is under way for more foster homes. There has been an increase in kinship placements.
- Pilot project for a visitation coaching model program is underway.
- An assessment for recommendations to improve transportation for parents to court and visits is underway.

4. Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services (MCILS): John Pelletier, Executive Director

- The budget for MCILS remains the same even with the increase in PC filings. MCILS has been able to accommodate the increase in PC filings because juvenile case filings are down.
- MCILS has been conducting statewide trainings for juvenile attorneys in juvenile matters.
- Juvenile Justice Reform: MCILS will be considering proposals to expand availability of counsel for juveniles in Long Creek.

V. **Strategic Planning**

1. Proposed Task Force Initiatives:

- **Task Force Information Sharing:** The Task Force discussed the need to establish a central location to share the information of the various groups dedicated to improving the child welfare system. The goal is to enhance communication and efficiency, while reducing redundancy. Bobbi Johnson will determine if the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel's website could house this information, and will update the Task Force at the next meeting.
- **Resource Navigator Pilot Project:** the goal of this pilot project would be to place an individual familiar with community resources in the courthouse to help provide early intervention and services for parents and those in need who are brought into the courthouse for other matters, such as eviction or foreclosure. A working group was established for this project with the following members: Chief Judge Oram, Debra Dunlap, Jamie Brooks, Shawna Lund, Gayle Erdheim, Page Nichols, Alyssa Wynn, Betsy Boardman, Caroline Jova.
- **Reunification Plans:** Various stakeholders have reported that the reunification and rehabilitation plans can be confusing and need to be clearer for parents. The AG's office and OCFS will meet to discuss potential changes to enhance clarity and will update Task Force members at the next meeting.

- **Expand Membership:** The Chief Justice and the Deputy Commissioner indicated a preference to have more diversity in membership. MJB to reach out to various individuals.

VI. **Next meeting:** November 1, 2019, 10:00am to 12:00pm, Capital Judicial Center (multipurpose room).