

Maine Justice for Children Task Force
June 8, 2018 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Champlain Conference Room at the Department of Public Safety
MEETING MINUTES

Members in attendance: Hon. Leigh I. 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 Maine District Court; Hon. Elizabeth Mitchell, Judge of Probate Court; Dr. Debra Baeder, Chief Forensic Psychologist; Steph Barrett, Implementation Coordinator at OCFS; Liam Shaw, Region 2 MEPP Coordinator; Kirsten Capeless, Acting Director, Office of Child and Family Services; Hon. Eric Mehnert, Chief Judge of the Penobscot Nation; Nora Sosnoff, Assistant Attorney General; Jeffrey Love, Lieutenant, Maine State Police.

Guests: Meg Hatch, Maine Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers; Frayla Tarpinian, Assistant District Attorney.

I. WELCOME —Maine Supreme Judicial Court Chief, Justice Leigh Saufley

- Reminder of active litigation discussion restriction

II. INTRODUCTIONS of ATTENDEES

III. PRESENTATION ON CHILDREN’S ADVOCACY CENTERS

Meg Hatch, Maine Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers (CAC) and Frayla Tarpinian, Assistant District Attorney, provided a presentation on Children’s Advocacy Centers, programs which are housed under the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

- Program provides comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach in order to provide services to children suspected of having been sexually abused.
- Goals of the program were discussed.
- Statutory discussion as to the logistics of information sharing between agencies.
- Over 850 Children’s Advocacy Centers across the country.
- In the calendar year 2017, the Maine Children’s Advocacy Centers conducted 942 forensic interviews and 1600 hours of family advocacy services were provided.
- Overview of the CAC process from beginning to end.
- Funding for the CAC is provided from federal funds, grants, and fundraising opportunities.

IV. UPDATES

Judicial Branch: Chief Judge Susan Oram

- Recently attended a training on family recovery courts.
- 10 judicial vacancies have now been filled by Governor LePage and the Legislature. It is expected that they will all be on the bench by mid-July

Judicial Branch: Tracy Leigh, GAL Service Coordinator

- Family Division created a new “Guide for Families in Child Protection Matters” and it is available in print form and on the Court’s website.
- A new scheduling planner for parents involved in child protective matters has also been created. These are distributed by parent attorneys or the court.

- Family Division has also been working on updating website content. It should be available by June 15, 2018.

Office of Child and Family Services at DHHS: Kirsten Capeless, Acting Director of the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS)

- OCFS received 20,530 reports of child abuse and neglect during the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2017.
- Over the past five years, an average of 20,300 intake reports were received each year with a high of 20,810 in FFY 2014. On average 10,300 (51%) are assigned for assessment.
- Of the 20,530 total reports for FFY 2017, 7,715 cases representing 13,618 children were classified as high risk and assessed by child protective services. It was determined that abuse and/or neglect had occurred in 29% of the cases listed above (1,673 substantiated/583 indicated).
- An additional 2,289 cases representing 4,370 children were referred to a contract agency for assessment.
- The most prevalent risk factors include untreated mental health issues, family violence, and substance abuse.
- During calendar year 2018 to date (as of June 8, 2018), there were 415 substance abuse exposed newborns reported. In 2017, there were a total of 952.
- There were also 1,711 youth in the Department's custody as of June 8, 2018.
- OCFS held a stakeholder meeting in February to gather information to draft its Program Improvement Plan (PIP), which is developed in response to the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) report.
- Over the past few months, OCFS has engaged in an extensive internal review of the Child Welfare System. As a result, OCFS has created multiple initiatives.
- OCFS has permission to immediately fill caseworker vacancies.

Office of the Attorney General: Nora Sosnoff, AAG, Chief, Child Protection Division

- New legislation was passed in the last session which in part addressed preference for kinship/sibling placement for children involved in a child protection matter.
- Child protection intake has had an increase in reports in the recent months. As a result, a higher number of cases are being assessed and a higher number of petitions are being filed in court. Discussion as to resulting issues due to the increase was had and action steps were discussed.
- Since March assessments have increased 38%.

V. MOVING FORWARD

OCFS Kirsten Capeless

- Discussed overarching initiatives at the Department

VI. NEXT MEETING: JANUARY 25, 2019 in the Multipurpose Room at the Capital Judicial Center in Augusta