

*The mission of MCWAP is to assure that the state system is meeting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families through assessment, research, case reviews, advocacy and greater citizen involvement. Our goal is to promote child safety and quality services for children, youth and families.*

## **Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel**

**Annual Retreat / September 11, 2020 / 9 am- 4 pm**

**In Person:** Maple Hill Farm Inn, Hallowell, ME / **Virtual:** Zoom

**Co-Chair:** Bobbi Johnson

**Co-Chair:** Deb Dunlap

**Panel Coordinator:** Kathryn Brice

**Presenter:** Dr. Blake Jones, PhD, University of Kentucky, College of Social Work

### **Agenda**

#### **9:00 a.m.- Welcome and Introductions**

In person attendance: Kathryn Brice, Marie Briggs, Jamie Brooks, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Lanelle Freeman, Bobbi Johnson, Alana Jones, Blake Jones, Debra McSweeney, Brittany Raven, Tammy Roy, Jean Youde

Virtual attendance: Christine Alberi, Esther Anne, Chris Bicknell, Betsy Boardman, Travis Bryant, Ahmen Cabral, Adrienne Carmack, Deb Dunlap, James Jacobs, Annette Macaluso, Ashley McAllister, Elizabeth McCullum, Erin Whitham

#### **9:15 a.m.- Review of OCFS Priorities for the Coming Year (Bobbi Johnson)**

OCFS has and will be continuing to prioritize efforts in three categories in the coming year: safety, permanency and wellbeing, and staff training and support.

##### Safety

OCFS has been strengthening both the intake and investigation processes. Efforts have been made to match call volumes to staffing needs, update the phone system, give queue priority to certain referents (for example, medical professionals will be prompted to press a certain button once they're in queue), implement SDM throughout the whole state (intake through permanency), and encourage a formal multidisciplinary response to substance-exposed infants.

##### Permanency and Well-Being

OCFS has been monitoring the number of children in care and will be continuing to place efforts on exploring the factors contributing to this as well as the barriers to children exiting care. OCFS will be developing a permanency review team, which will establish a process for ensuring that the barriers to children exiting care will be mitigated within certain time intervals. A new family plan is also being piloted and OCFS has connected with various stakeholders to ensure that they have the opportunity to provide feedback; the hope is that this plan will be easier for families to understand, compared to the comprehensive plan that CPS is currently using.

##### Staff Training and Support

OCFS will be training staff on critical incident stress management processes and will be determining how leaders and clinical support staff can help workers when there are serious

injuries, child deaths, or when they're just feeling overwhelmed. OCFS is looking at workload and caseload, as well as the CQI process to make sure that there is better coordination in providing training in advance of new policies being rolled out. A new software, CCWIS, will be replacing MACWIS; leadership has been examining the various autofill forms that are currently used to determine which will carry over and which are no longer useful. Moving forward, OCFS will be focusing on prevention, ensuring that community services are available and being accessed so that children can remain in their homes, whenever possible. Leadership has consulted with other states regarding their practices and has met with Dr. Jones recently to better appreciate how the work of the panel can connect to the work of OCFS.

### Trends

OCFS has been interested in comparative trends between 2020, 2019 and 2018, especially during the pandemic months. The data has demonstrated that over the last 5 years, there has been a significant increase in children entering care; during the pandemic, this trend has continued to gradually increase, which is an anomaly in comparison to other states. Tammy Roy has been charged with exploring these trends and has found that untreated mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence are typical factors in families whose children have entered care recently. Additional trends have identified that most of these families have prior CPS history and that caseworkers aren't always engaging out-of-home parents prior to filing a petition; OCFS will be looking more closely at all of this. Data has also demonstrated that during the beginning of the pandemic, there was a decrease in the number of reports received. Over time, this has leveled out and the numbers now are consistent with what has been observed in 2018 and 2019. Despite the lower level of reports during the pandemic months, CPS workers have been going out on more investigations: one reason for this is that in counties where there was community transmission of COVID-19, caseworkers were handling all investigations as ARP was not being assigned.

### **9:45 a.m.- Citizen Review Panels: History, Challenges, Research and Best Practices (Dr. Blake Jones)**

Citizen Review Panels are expected to be composed of volunteer members with diverse backgrounds, who are broadly representative of the community and must include members who have expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect (CA/N). Panels must meet at least quarterly and prepare an annual report with activities and recommendations; child welfare agencies must respond to these reports in writing.

### History

- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (1974)
  - o Requires that children be represented in court; statute is non-specific about whether or not this role should be held by an attorney
    - Court Appointed Special Advocate program grew, following this mandate
- Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (1980)
  - o Requires a process for review related to children in out-of-home care
- CAPTA Reauthorization (1996)
  - o Requires that states establish CRPs to ensure compliance with state and federal standards
- CAPTA Reauthorization (2003)
  - o Requires CRPs to evaluate practice, policy and procedure and develop means for public outreach
  - o Requires child welfare agencies to respond in writing to annual reports

- CAPTA Reauthorization (2010)
  - o Required a study and report to Congress on the effectiveness of CRPs
  - o Specified that adult former victims of CA/N could be panel members

### Challenges

- Citizens have trouble understanding the complexities of state agencies and the overwhelming nature of PIPs, CFSRs, etc.; numerous citizen groups, so easy to get lost in the mix
- Difficulty in choosing substantive topics that are also of value to the agency
- Distrust from frontline workers and some panel members wish to overhaul the agency
- Time lag between the launch of new initiatives and when CRPs are informed
- Differences between agencies (budget, politics, incremental change, etc.) and CRPs (passion, personal experience, open to using public shame, etc.)

### Review of Literature

- Authentic communication impacts perceived effectiveness (Jones, 2004)
- CRP members want clearer goals/objectives and better communication (Jones & Royse, 2008)
- More training of CRP members is needed (Bryan, Collins-Camargo & Jones, 2011; Collins-Camargo, Buckwalter & Jones, 2016)
- Self-governance is needed, as is improved group cohesion (Bryan, Jones & Lawson, 2009)

Dr. Jones discussed additional topics, including how state agencies can develop good relationships with citizens, ways to foster collaboration between agencies and CRPs, how to share information, membership recruitment, etc.

### **10:45 a.m.- SWOT Analysis**

The panel was given the opportunity to participate in an exercise that would create 'word clouds' to illustrate members' thoughts on MCWAP's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Once the exercise was complete, the panel was invited to reflect on how to capitalize on strengths and opportunities and minimize weaknesses and threats. Some of the themes that emerged involved collaboration and identified opportunity for further change and education. The panel identified politics, lack of diversity (including no youth voice) and lack of resources as challenges to MCWAP.

### **11:15 a.m.- Brainstorm of Possible Topics for the Coming Year**

The panel discussed the work of the two existing subcommittees (Education and Training for Caseworkers and Foster Families related to Children with Disabilities; Father Engagement). Both subcommittees expressed that they struggled initially with a focus that was too broad. The Education and Training subgroup is not yet ready to make recommendations but is collaborating with OCFS and the Muskie School in identifying where efforts will be most valuable. The Father Engagement subgroup has emailed their recommendations to the rest of the panel and is waiting to hear as to whether the document will be approved for the annual report.

The panel then participated in another exercise to brainstorm possible topic areas for future work. Twelve ideas were presented, including, but not limited to, residential treatment balances in Maine, cultural competency in foster care placements, support for parents after TPRs, etc.

### **12:-00 p.m.- Lunch**

### **12:45 p.m.- Choosing of Topic(s)**

The panel was asked to vote on the topics that they would be in favor of working on for the following year, and three workgroups were formed: Case Endings and Planning for Co-Parenting/DV issues; Effective Communication/Coordination for the Care of Children Entering the System; Child Welfare Training

**1:00 p.m.- Break into Team for Strategic Planning**

Panel members were asked to split into groups, based on their interest in the topics listed. The groups were given worksheets to complete (Attachment I), which they would later report back to the group on. The groups are as follows:

Case Endings and Planning for Co-Parenting/DV Issues

Leaders: Kelly Dell'Aquila, Jamie Brooks

Participants: Lanelle Freeman, Brittany Raven

Effective Communication/Coordination for the Care of Children Entering the System

Leaders: Debra McSweeney, Alana Jones

Participants: Christine Alberi, Esther Anne, Betsy Boardman, Marie Briggs, Ahmen Cabral, Adrienne Carmack, Annette Macaluso, Elizabeth McCullum

Child Welfare Training

Leaders: Travis Bryant, Jean Youde

Participants: Chris Bicknell, James Jacobs, Ashley McAllister, Erin Whitham

**2:30 p.m.- Teams Report Back to the Larger Group and Discussion of Logistics**

Each group was asked to provide an overview of their topic, as well as discuss some goals and any needs that they may have.

**3:30 p.m.- Closing Celebration**

The panel was asked to complete a final exercise that would illustrate the reasons they choose to continue doing the work that they do through MCWAP. Themes included children, family, change, care, hope and potential.

**4:00 p.m.- Adjourn**

The panel thanked Dr. Jones for the presentation and asked that the leaders of each subcommittee type their Strategic Planning sheet and submit to Kathryn in the coming days.