

*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**

**February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 / 9 a.m.- 11 a.m.**

**Virtual:** Meeting held over Zoom

**Co-Chair:** Bobbi Johnson

**Co-Chair:** Deb Dunlap

**Panel Coordinator:** Kathryn Brice

### **Agenda**

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

Virtual attendance: Christine Alberi, Chris Bicknell, Betsy Boardman, Kathryn Brice, Jamie Brooks, Travis Bryant, Adrienne Carmack, Lyn Carter, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Deb Dunlap, Lanelle Freeman, Jim Jacobs, Bobbi Johnson, Todd Landry, Libby McCullum, Deb McSweeney, Brittany Raven, Tammy Roy, Cindy Seekins, Erin Whitham, Jean Youde

The Panel was informed that a new member of the Maine State Bar Association has reached out looking for more information on the child protection system in Maine. This citizen is specifically interested in learning more about child protection/juvenile justice as it relates to an inactive subsection of the MSBA which would benefit from reconstitution. While this is not a MCWAP- specific activity, Deb Dunlap recommended that members who are interested in voluntarily sharing their expertise with him connect with her to be put in touch.

#### **9:10 a.m.- New Business**

Providing Feedback on OCFS Policy: The Panel heard from Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director of OCFS, who introduced today's conversation as an opportunity to revisit the context in which OCFS is exploring policies, both in developing new policies and in coordinating review and feedback.

Members were reminded that OCFS is in the process of updating all child welfare policies. The Muskie team and the Department have been working collaboratively to review policies, outline next steps, and compile workgroups (which would include external stakeholders) to help with the development of each policy. Once a policy is finalized, OCFS will post it online to both the intranet (available to DHHS staff) as well as the internet (for stakeholders, citizens, etc.). The Department will also be ensuring that all staff are adequately informed of any changes to policy and that they are equipped with any specialized skills or knowledge needed in order to satisfactorily put policy into practice.

Before a policy is finalized, OCFS will be sending the draft out for review and feedback will be sought. Given the scope of MCWAP and its members, the Department is eager to involve this Panel in the process as well. Recently, the Executive Committee met to outline how MCWAP members will have the opportunity to provide feedback on policies, and devised the following proposal: when policies are sent out for comment, the Panel Coordinator will forward the notice and draft to the Panel; Panel members

will then have the opportunity to individually review the policy and email the Panel Coordinator with any feedback they may have; the Coordinator will compile the feedback and forward the information to the Policy Specialist at OCFS. From there, the original policy workgroup will review the feedback and make changes as necessary while being mindful of statutes, best practice, and how the policy in question relates to others. As such, not all feedback will necessarily be adopted. Additionally, not every policy will be sent out for review prior to being adopted; some policies track state and federal law and therefore will not be made available for feedback.

Bobbi reminded the Panel of a few important points to keep in mind when members are sent draft policies: 1- feedback is optional- not all Panel members have to provide a response, but if it is a policy that they are interested in or have particular expertise, they are encouraged to review; 2- given the volume of policies being reviewed, there will likely be a tight timeframe between when the Panel Coordinator emails the draft to members and the deadline to provide feedback.

The Panel was asked if they had any questions or comments. Members voiced that they appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on possible changes to policy before they are adopted. The group also mentioned being encouraged that new statewide policies will be in place, citing that it can be difficult when each district appears to follow its own set of standards.

Both Bobbi and Todd Landry, OCFS Director, responded, saying that over the years OCFS has reached out to specific groups for feedback (for example, YLAT, AFFM, etc.), but have not always connected with MCWAP regarding policies before they have been put into practice. With that, they reminded members that not every policy will come through this group, but those that are passed along for OCFS feedback will be shared with MCWAP as well. Todd thanked members for the comment about consistency in practice and stated that he'd be remiss to not also mention that the most consistent theme that came up in the recent OCFS public forums was around the lack of consistency within the entire system, not just the agency. With that, Todd invited members to think about how MCWAP can promote consistency throughout the system as a whole, including with GALs, AAGs, providers, etc.

Members remarked that the children and families who are involved with CPS have such varying circumstances, that there will always be some inconsistencies around policy. The group highlighted that this is part of the challenge: the system should be flexible enough to account for varying circumstances but should also adhere to policy whenever possible. Bobbi agreed, stating that there is always room for staff to bring special considerations forward when an individual family might be served in a different way. The group suggested that it might be helpful to discuss what to do when they notice that policy is not being followed in the field. Bobbi reminded the Panel that they are always encouraged to provide immediate feedback to staff, especially if it impacts the experience for families; it likely would also make sense to check in as a larger group about ongoing observations in general implementation.

The Executive Committee agreed to update MCWAP's practice guide regarding how the Panel will review and provide feedback on new policies.

#### **9:40 a.m.- MCWAP Updates:**

Ombudsman Report: The Panel was reminded that the Ombudsman Report had recently been disseminated. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties, Christine Alberi, Executive Director, Ombudsman, was not able to participate in today's call. As such, it was decided that the Panel would hold space for this topic at an upcoming meeting.

Annual Report: Committee members were thanked for their diligent efforts in contributing to MCWAP's Annual Report, which will also be posted on the new Citizen Review Panels Website ([www.mecitizenreviewpanels.com](http://www.mecitizenreviewpanels.com)). The Panel was notified that the document has already been sent out to the legislative Health and Human Services Committee, though a response has not yet been received. The Executive Committee remarked that between the launch of the new website and submitting the report before the deadline, it's been wonderful to see how far this Panel has come over the past few years.

Father Engagement Listening Sessions: The Panel was reminded that they had recommended to OCFS that MCWAP and the Department collaborate on facilitating listening sessions for fathers who are involved with CPS. While this recommendation will ultimately fall under Group 1's charge (Family-Centered Policy and Practice), it's a large undertaking on top of the work that the subcommittee is already doing. As such, Panel members were asked to volunteer to sit on the Father Engagement subcommittee should that be of interest to them. Ultimately, several members offered to help with this project: Bobbi, Cindy, Jamie, Chris, Erin, Kelly, Lyn, Travis and Jean.

Miscellaneous: Members asked about various housekeeping issues, including access to ShareFile and keeping an updated list of members. Kathryn agreed to look into these topics.

Workgroup Meetings: The Executive Committee reminded members that the groups can call in the Coordinator to their breakout rooms at any time, if questions arise.

With that, the Subcommittees broke out into separate Zoom rooms to work on their topics. Once the breakout groups rejoined the main group, they were asked to provide updates to the Panel:

**1. Family-centered policy and practice**

*Kelly, Betsy, Lyn, Lanelle, Brittany, Esther, Jamie, Annette, Andrea, Christine*

The group reported that they are in the process of writing recommendations regarding training that focusses on case endings.

The subcommittee notified Panel members that their next group meeting will be held on 02/17 at noon, if any one was interested in joining.

**2. Effective communication/coordination for the care of children entering the system**

*Alana, Cindy, Jim, Ahmen, Deb McSweeney, Marie*

Members reported that they spent their breakout room session with guest Hope Tormey, OCFS Resource Parent Program Manager, to hear more about how information is shared with resource families. Hope stated that within the new child welfare system that is being created (CCWIS), there will be a function that allows foster/adoptive parents to log in and access provider records regarding the children in their care. The group questioned if this function would also include developmental services records or records from schools, and wondered about the vetting process for access to these records, including who would be responsible for maintaining them. Hope told the group that she would inquire with the CCWIS team and get back to them.

Hope also reported that not all districts are using the binder system for children in care, and the group brainstormed ways that they could make that process more streamlined. The

subcommittee discussed that it may be useful for resource families to have access to a 'portal' of sorts. The portal could not only include information about the children in their care but also FAQs for resource families, including how to submit mileage, etc. The group will be looking into this and thinking about how this site would be maintained over time.

Bobbi reported that the launch date for CCWIS is slated for January 2022. As such, the Department is at the very beginning of developing the resource parent portal. The CCWIS project is broken up into development phases, including prioritizing the functions that caseworkers must have in place to carry out their duties, but also a backlog phase and a wish list phase. Bobbi is not sure at which point the resource parent portal would be incorporated into CCWIS, but the Department is also collaborating with other states regarding this topic as well. At the very least, the plan is for resource families to have access to input and retrieve information.

Adrienne Carmack, OCFS Medical Director, reported that she was in a meeting recently with a group of medical practitioners regarding the 'OpenNotes' system, which allows patients to access their medical records. Some questions that came up were around confidentiality- who has access to information if children are in custody, do parents of teenagers have access to their records, etc. These are considerations to think about in the future as these portals become available.

### **3. Child welfare staff training**

*Erin, Ashley, Travis, Jean, Chris, Libby*

The subcommittee reported that they spent their time today debriefing the conversation they had had last month with Julia Simmons regarding supervisory training. They began discussing recommendations regarding this training, including possibly shortening the time that new supervisors have to complete the modules (which currently must be completed over the course of their first year). The group also discussed potentially recommending peer support groups, where new supervisors can meet to talk about their common challenges. The group will be writing their recommendations via email outside of MCWAP meetings. As such, they will not need to meet again as this subcommittee. Instead, they are willing to move their focus over to the Father Engagement work.

The Panel then discussed how that might work, given that volunteers from other subcommittees also agreed to participate on the Father Engagement committee. Members ultimately agreed that those who were interested in starting the Father Engagement work would meet as a subcommittee during the MCWAP breakout sessions. That group will then report back out to the Panel (as is done now), so other members will also be able to provide feedback and be kept updated about the work being done. If volunteers would like to switch into the Father Engagement group, they are welcome to do so at any point.

#### **10:45 a.m.- Standing Agenda Items**

Miscellaneous: A Panel member had a question about incorporating youth voice into the Panel, as the idea had been floated around in the past. Specifically, members wondered if CJA/CAPTA funds could be used to pay a youth \$15/hour to participate. The OCFS team agreed to look into this.

Mission Statement: The Executive Committee reported that while compiling information for the Annual Report, it came to their attention that there is a phrase in MCWAP's mission statement that suggests the

Panel conducts case reviews. While Citizen Review Panels are charged with conducting case reviews, that isn't something that MCWAP does; instead, the Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel (CDSIRP) is tasked with this charge. In previous discussions, MCWAP agreed to focus on a high-level systems review of work, including policy, caseworker practice, etc. Given that the 'case review' phrase is technically inaccurate then, the Executive Committee wondered about voting to remove it from MCWAP's mission statement altogether.

The group suggested that MCWAP might not even be set up for the level of confidentiality that is required when conducting case reviews. The Executive Committee reminded members that they should be signing a confidentiality agreement when joining as a member of MCWAP. The Panel Coordinator reported that it is likely that a new version of a confidentiality agreement would need to be created and signed, in order to include language regarding confidentiality when working remotely. Members ultimately decided that they would like to have more time to review MCWAP's bylaws and the CAPTA language before voting on whether to change the mission statement. Similarly, the Executive Committee would also need to look at pulling references to case reviews out of MCWAP's bylaws.

Members wondered if there was a plan for CPS cases to be brought forward in the review sessions held by the Department of Corrections, formed in response to COVID-19. Bobbi reported that she had not heard that that is what is intended, but she is not a lead on that team so she is unsure of whether it has been discussed.

#### **11:00 a.m.- Adjourn and Next Steps**

Kathryn to update ShareDrive

Kathryn to circulate new Confidentiality Statement

Kathryn to update membership list and put it on ShareDrive.

Kathryn to start email chain with Father Engagement group.

OCFS to inquire about whether CJA/CAPTA funds could be used towards paying a youth for their time to sit on the Panel.

**Next Panel Meeting: Virtual Meeting, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 9 a.m.- 11 a.m.**