

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

January 8th, 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: Chris Bicknell, Betsy Boardman, Kathryn Brice, Marie Briggs, Ahmen Cabral, Adrienne Carmack, Lyn Carter, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Deb Dunlap, Gina Googins, Lanelle Freeman, Jim Jacobs, Bobbi Johnson, Annette Macaluso, Andrea Mancuso, Ashley McAllister, Libby McCullum, Deb McSweeney, Brittany Raven, Tammy Roy, Cindy Seekins, Julia Simmons, Erin Whitham, Jean Youde

9:10 a.m.- New Business

OCFS Policy Discussion: The Panel welcomed guest Gina Googins, Regional Associate Director for Districts 4, 5, Intake, and Policy and Training.

Gina explained that the Department's Child Welfare division includes over 128 policies, many of which are outdated. In 2019, OCFS entered a 5-year cooperative project with the University of Southern Maine's (USM) Cutler Institute to examine and revise the policies currently in place. The project aims to build a protocol for how policies are developed, revised, approved and put into process, as well as to create new trainings for OCFS that are in line with the changing policies and practices. Some key goals of the collaboration include reviewing all policies; identifying which will be eliminated, merged or revised; creating new policies, guided by law and/or practice expectations; and determining a timeline and sequence for policy development and writing. The project will also be working to consider that language within one policy is consistent amongst all policies (for example, making sure that any policy that mentions Family Team Meetings contains consistent information). OCFS staff will be surveyed to better understand what supports they would need when new policies roll out, as well as determining how the Department will ensure that these policies are being adhered to. From there, the Policy unit will work with the Training and Quality Assurance teams to ensure that the policies are in line with federal law, the CFSR and OCFS practice.

Gina reported that the project aims to also identify a process for long term policy revision and development, especially as the field (including laws, practice, federal recommendations, etc.) is constantly changing. With that, the group will also be reviewing the implementation process: it is critical that caseworkers are kept abreast of any policy changes and have guidance around incorporating policy into practice.

As it stands now, the Policy Workforce group- comprised of staff from the Cutler Institute and OCFS- and the Policy Coordinator identify which policies need to be worked on, as well as their level of priority and the timeline for completing them. From there, the group identifies content experts (individuals who have specialized knowledge of the topics of the policy in question) and invites them to join the policy development process. From there, a group of no more than 10 stakeholders- internal and external- is formed, and work begins on drafting the policy. Once drafted, the policy is sent to the Regional Associate Directors, and Julia Simmons, Policy and Training Program Manager, for review. Once their edits and comments have been received, reviewed and incorporated, the draft is then sent to the OCFS Associate Director. Again, comments and edits are made and sent back to the workgroup. Once changes have been incorporated, the group then decides who else should be reviewing the document- sometimes all staff, sometimes a smaller team like the caseworker advisory team or district management team, for example. The updated draft then gets forwarded to the identified group for comments. Once the comments are received, the workgroup goes over the comments and makes changes as necessary. This version is then sent to the Executive Management team- Associate Director, Communication and Compliance Manager, AAGs Office, OCFS Director- for review. Again, comments are compiled, and changes are made. Lastly, the final draft of the policy is sent to the Associate Director who vets it through the OCFS Director. Once the policy has been approved, it is then implemented.

All policies that are finalized are sent to all staff noting the changes, the reason for the changes, and how the policy will be trained. This education can be accomplished through multiple avenues: email notifications, discussion within unit meetings, discussion at district-wide meetings, webinars, etc. The Learning Management System also has an option to require staff to read certain policies and then answer a quiz at the end. Staff may receive occasional texts with questions about a policy that they have to answer. Some policies will only require a few of these avenues of training, while others may require all of them.

Currently, the policies being worked on are as follows: ICPC, staff safety, social media, human trafficking, intake, Safe Haven, placement with Department employees, substance exposed infant, service authorization, FTM policy, adoption policy, entry into care, etc.

Panel members asked Gina how MCWAP could be involved in the feedback process. Gina underscored the Department's desire to have stakeholders review policies and posited that it might be helpful to involve MCWAP at the time when policies go out to OCFS staff for review. The group suggested that the Policy Coordinator could email new policies to MCWAP's Coordinator to forward to the group. From there, members could self-select which policies they would like to review and/or provide feedback on.

Members also recommended that perhaps MCWAP could be made aware of which policies are being worked on, so that there could be a dialog in the group about the topics covered in the policy ahead of time. Additionally, there was a discussion around including accountability measures with the policies, to ensure a better understanding of how OCFS plans to measure whether policies are being successfully implemented.

Lastly, Panel members acknowledged the efforts that OCFS has made to be transparent and inclusive of external stakeholders as they move forward in their work. The group agreed that it was within MCWAP's charge to be included in OCFS policy work and appreciated the relationship between the group and the Department.

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 had met last Wednesday and have set a monthly standing meeting date. They have talked about implementing a training for stakeholders regarding Family Matter and Child Protective cases and are exploring which topics to cover. Today, the group discussed MCWAP's previously identified recommendation to host listening sessions for fathers involved with CPS. The group wondered if, given the new topics chosen by the subcommittees, that task was one that fell under this group's responsibility. The Executive Committee agreed that this subcommittee should be charged with the listening sessions, but will require additional resources for this task, and a decision was made to have a larger conversation at next month's meetings to inquire about whether members of other groups would be able to help as well. Lastly, the group talked about the 2019 Parent Survey and a request was made to share it with the Justice for Children Taskforce (as there is crossover in the work of that Panel). A suggestion was also made that the results of the survey be synthesized and shared back with the parents who participated in the survey.

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

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

The subcommittee reported that their discussion today was centered around the online portal or passports for health and education. The group is looking to get some information from Bobbi Johnson, and possibly others, about what the Department currently has in place and what conversations have been had in the past. The group will also be looking into lining up funding, and exploring how online portals function, who the developers are and how the right information can be provided, going forward.

OCFS explained that an online portal is in the works and is on the list of things to be developed with the new MACWIS systems (CCWIS). The group was reminded that there is also an online portal- Health Info Net- that medical providers can use to see their patient's medical records, even if these records are from other providers; however, the portal does not allow for patient access.

3. Child welfare staff training

Erin, Ashley, Travis, Jean, Chris, Libby

The subcommittee was joined by guest Julia Simmons to discuss the OCFS supervisory trainings currently in place, including the trainings that new supervisors are expected to participate in. Julia will be sharing some addition materials with the group which they plan to discuss at the next meeting.

10:50 a.m.- Standing Agenda Items

Approval of December 2020 Minutes: Unanimous vote to approve minutes from December 2020 meeting.

OCFS Updates: The Panel wondered if OCFS had a vision of what the father listening sessions would look like, and who the targeted audience would be. OCFS reported that this has not yet specifically been defined, and perhaps it would be valuable for MCWAP to help in doing so. The group acknowledged that its last recommendations to the Department were substantial, and the Panel's work was entwined in each of them. It would be important to have a larger discussion at the next meeting around how to support OCFS in implementing the recommendations that were adopted.

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

Gina to email PowerPoint presentation to Kathryn to share with the group.

Kathryn and Martha (Policy Coordinator) to coordinate how best to acquire feedback from MCWAP.

Next Panel Meeting: Virtual Meeting, February 5th, 2021, 9 a.m.- 11 a.m.