

**Maine Justice for Children Task Force**  
**December 15, 2020 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.**  
**Via Zoom**

**DECEMBER MEETING MINUTES**

**Attendees:**

Hon. Andrew Mead, Acting Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court; Hon. Ellen Gorman, Associate Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court; Hon. Jed French, Chief Judge of the District Court; Hon. Jared Crockett, Judge of Probate; Caroline Jova, Family Division Manager; Betsy Boardman, Child Protective and Juvenile Process Specialist; Joanna Davis, Family Division Process Specialist; Kaela Jalbert, Coordinator, Guardian ad Litem Services; Katharine Wiltuck, Director of Process, Planning, and Services; Randall Liberty Dr. Todd Landry, Director of the Office of Child and Family Services; Nora Sosnoff, Assistant Attorney General; Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director of Child and Welfare Services; Ellie Maciag, MCILS; Mike Sauschuck, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety; Liam Shaw, Maine General; Francine Garland Stark, Executive Director, MCEVD; Andrea Mancuso, MCEVD; Elizabeth Ward Saxl, Executive Director, MECASA; Travis Bryant, Executive Director, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program; Christine Alberi, Executive Director, Ombudsman; Jamie Brooks, Parents as Partners; Kelly Dell'Aquila, Opportunity Alliance; Xi Chen, Assistant Attorney General; Mary Bonauto, GLAD; .

**I. Welcome:** Hon. Andrew Mead, Acting Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court

**Introduction of Attendees**

**Minutes from August 2020 meeting approved.**

**II. Updates**

**1. Judicial Branch: Hon. Andrew Mead, Acting Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court**

- **Odyssey and Email Filing:** Odyssey case management system as well as “eFiling” has begun in Penobscot County as well as the Business and Consumer Dockets statewide.
- **New and revised Pandemic Management Orders (PMO) issued.** Caseworkers may file requests for PPOs using “efiling,” “email filing,” and paper filing. Please see PMO-SJC-3 for the timing of when each method may be used.
- **COVID-19 Update:** The Five-Phased Management Plan that was originally issued by the Maine Supreme Judicial Court has been revised. A team at the judicial branch meets two times a day to go over COVID-19 protocols and concerns.
- **New Website:** The Maine Judicial Branch recently launched a new website.

**2. Organizational Update from the Judicial Branch: Hon. Jed French, Chief Judge of the District Court**

- **Overview of PC filings to-date:**
  - 2019: 1,325
  - 2020: 1,043
- **Child Welfare Conference:** Held virtually in October 2020. Average attendance at each session was 205 people.
- **August CASA Training:** Highest attendance ever with 31 trainees. CASA is also holding brown-bag lunches for volunteers.
- Courts continue to hold most cases virtually and in-person when needed.

### 3. Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS): Dr. Todd Landry, Director

- **Child Welfare Priorities Update:**
  - OCFS has implemented the updated family plans based on input from stakeholders. There are now three separate plans:
    - Preliminary Rehabilitation and Reunification Plan;
    - Rehabilitation and Reunification Plan; and
    - Prevention Services Family Plan.
- **Number of children in care** as of 12/14/2020- 2,290 which is down from the highest number on 10/21/2020 of 2,374.
- **Family Team Meetings:** Holding family team meetings both virtually and in-person.
- **Permanency Outcomes in Maine:** Maine is struggling with permanency within 12 months of when the child comes into care. Statewide average of children who achieve permanency within 12 months is 20.7%. Federal goal is 40.5%.
- **COVID-19 Update**
  - Numbers of cases in Maine continue to increase. 32 children in care have tested positive for COVID-19. About half of those cases were in residential placements and the other half in foster/kinship placements.
  - New guidance for OCFS staff has been established based on CDC recommendations. They have developed a staff tracker—13 staff have tested positive, out of 656 total employees.
  - OCFS is meeting with providers (ARP, transportation, Children’s Advocacy Centers, and family visitation centers) to prepare for the next phase of the pandemic.
- **Family First Prevention Services Act**
  - The act aims to increase evidence-based prevention services for eligible children and families in order to prevent the need for foster care placement.
  - Maine’s draft plan is almost ready for review.
  - Additional materials were provided to the task force in preparation for this meeting.

### 4. An Organizational Update from the Office of the Attorney General – Nora Sosnoff, AAG, Chief, Child Protection Division

- There is a shortage of attorneys to represent parents in many regions of the state. It is becoming a critical problem and requires attention.
- Notice of hearings are often sent out as short as two business days before a contested hearing.
- Remote hearings have been going very well and AAGs have seen excellent participation by parties. There have been technology issues but the cases have kept moving. The AAGs request that the courts continue using this technology as communities are experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks.

### **III. Strategic Plan Updates**

- **Reunification Plans: Bobbi Johnson**
  - OCFS has implemented the new plans, as noted above.
- **Task Force Information Sharing: Bobbi Johnson & Betsy Boardman**
  - The website houses information for all three CAPTA required citizen review panels: Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel, Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel, and the Justice for Children Task Force.
  - The website will include meeting agendas, meeting notes, and annual reports.
  - The website is expected to be approved shortly and a link will be emailed to task force members when completed.
- **Parent Curriculum Workgroup: Betsy Boardman**
  - Workgroup met to discuss the development of a parent curriculum for families who become involved in the child welfare system. The class will provide a brief overview of the child welfare system and all of the individuals involved in the process. The curriculum includes an overview of timelines, communication and social media tips, and how to make the most of parent-child visitation.
  - The Opportunity Alliance believes they have capacity to house this program. The program would be a two-hour virtual session that could be offered, possibly, twice per month. It would be conducted by a parent who has successfully navigated the child welfare system.
  - A recommendation was made to move forward with the project.
  - Next workgroup meeting is January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
  - Cultural community representatives will email Betsy with possible recommendations of additional workgroup members.

### **IV. Cross-System Discussion and New Strategic Planning Suggestions**

- Clarification as to the difference between email filing for the district courts and the probate courts.
- Information was requested as to what data the Maine Judicial Branch can collect.

### **V. Next meetings:**

- March 16, 2021- 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

- June 15, 2021- 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
- September 14, 2021- 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
- December 14, 2021- 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

**Adjourn** (12:00 p.m.)

**Attachments:**

Child Welfare: An Update on System Improvement Efforts